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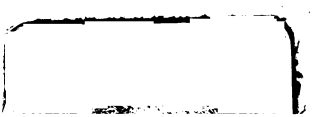
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IN THREE VOLUMES

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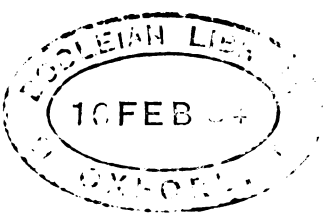
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TO

JOHN R. ROBINSON

THIS BOOK

IS

CORDIALLY DEDICATED

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THE CANON'S WARD.

CHAPTER I.

THE CRONIES.

WHAT 'the High' is to Oxford men, picturesque, unique, unapproachable, 'the Backs'—the river gardens at the backs of their colleges—are to Cambridge men. There is beauty all along the river from St. John's to Corpus; 'linked sweetness'—for do not the bridges join the gardens?—'long drawn out.' It may be a personal partiality, but I venture to think that immediately in front of Trinity College the beauty of 'the Backs' culminates. There—to my eyes—the stream is broader (it has 'a feeder' through which a tiny shallop may be pushed beneath the lime-

boughs); there—to my ears—'the frequent pulse' of oars is more musical than elsewhere; the bridges have a more graceful curve. The tender greensward; the fragrant overhanging lime-walk like a cathedral aisle in leaf; a picture glazed, alas! with tears, for those with whom, like me, 'tis winter time, while when they saw it last, long years ago, 'twas May with them from head to heel.'

It is 'The May' now (as the May term is called), and 'the Backs' are at their best, though not their brightest, for dewy eve is about to fall. The sky-colours above tree and turret are like a herald's garb, the herald of the summer; the bells of old St. Mary are clashing overhead, but mellowed by distance; the tinkle of the college bell is calling the white-robed students, flitting ghostlike through arch and corridor, to prayer, or at all events to chapel. Upon the water lingers yet a fairy fleet, and the light dip of the feathered oar, full on the stream, and sharp beneath the

bridge, falls dreamily on the ear. To the actors in such a scene, its glories are less visible than to the eye of memory. We are none of us fully aware of our happiness while it is with us, and Youth is as unconscious of it as is the flower of its blossom. It is Age alone which admires—and regrets.

At the open window above the college archway, a middle-aged man, his hair just tinged with grey, but with intellectual features that still retain traces of physical beauty, is regarding this fair landscape with feelings that are unshared by those he looks upon, and whose presence enlivens it. His thoughts are grave, though they are gladdened by its beauty. The grass is as green as when he trod it thirty years ago, and the fragrance of the lime-walk has lost none of its sweetness, yet how much is gone that was there before! All is crowded with life, yet how great is the gap that Death and Change have made !

A light hand, though it belongs to a man

of six feet high, is laid upon the dreamer's shoulders, and he looks up in the face of an old friend. It is Mavors, the tutor, with whom he had been at college, and who had remained at work there while he himself had taken a college living, given it up through ill health, been made a Canon of the neighbouring cathedral, and finally had come back to Cambridge to 'reside.'

'Why, Aldred, you are musing!' exclaimed the new-comer, in bantering but not unmusical tones. 'Are you regretting that you have not once more an undergraduate's gown upon your shoulders? Such thoughts never come into my head, because, I suppose, I have other things to do. The hand of least employment has the daintier sense. A thousand pardons—I forgot the Concordance.'

'I was thinking of my boy,' said the Canon, gently.

'To be sure,' returned the other, his voice changing at once to one of sympathy. 'He

would be just the age for coming up; and you would have liked to have him here, of course. The lads would interest one no doubt if one had a son amongst them; as it is, I think Trinity would be the most delightful place in the world if it wasn't for the lads.'

'A pigeon-pie without the pigeon,' remarked the Canon, smiling; 'tough beef and hard eggs—though not so tough and not so hard as some of you would make yourselves out to be.'

'Ah, you have forgotten what it is to be a tutor,' returned the other; 'what one suffers from those who bring up their offspring to us days before the term begins—the "Early Fathers" and the mothers—as to a dry-nurse, each with their tale of intelligent precocity and budding genius; likewise from the young gentlemen themselves, so full of promise, who take to spirits and the female retailers of spirits, and are sent down—after

a brief but voluptuous career—in their second year.'

'They are not all like that, however, if I remember rightly.'

'Oh, no; there are your romantic young gentlemen, who know Shelley by heart, and even your own Milton, and who would perhaps get their fellowships, only that the day before they take their degree they marry their bedmaker's daughter.'

'And are there now no students?' inquired the Canon, giving way to the other's humour.

'Certainly, one or two; and those from the tutor's point of view are the worst of all. They mostly take to mathematics; wear wet towels round their heads all night, and eventually get brain fever, and drown themselves in the river yonder: you have no idea how my time is taken up with Inquests.'

'Still, I wish my boy were here, Mavors,'

sighed the Canon, 'and that you were his tutor.'

'And I wish it, too, Aldred, with all my heart. Still, it is my firm conviction that a boy of character knows what is best for himself; for ninety-nine lads out of a hundred it is all one: "soldier, sailor, tinker, tailor, gentleman, apothecary, ploughboy, thief;" they are as fit for one calling as another; but your Robert, he is the hundredth. He has views of his own, or so it seemed to me when I saw him at the Rectory; he will distinguish himself in whatever profession he has a mind for.'

The colour rose to the Canon's cheek; to have his boy praised was the greatest pleasure life had left for him.

'But a soldier, Mavors; and in India!'

'Well, a soldier is better, at all events, than any other of the professions I mentioned. You wouldn't make him a sailor, I suppose, serving in a gun-boat in the Tropics,

without half the necessary amount of cubic feet of air to breathe in; nor yet a young gentleman at large, which means, in the end, the Insolvent Court. And as to India, just think how your Indian enjoys getting home!'

'Ah, if he ever does,' returned the Canon, mournfully.

'Why shouldn't he? What's to prevent him? He's not the boy to take to brandy pawnee. A few years——'

'Five, at least, Mavors,' put in the other, mournfully; 'and the lad's ambitious; if there's an opening he will make for it.'

'And make his mark there,' added the Tutor, cheerfully. 'Why one would really think that the boy had been sentenced to penal servitude. You ought to be ashamed of yourself, Aldred. Have you not your sister to take care of you and look to your comforts; I wish *I* had a sister. The way in which I am robbed right and left by my bedmaker is something incredible; I order

everything in in duplicate, and I don't mind her taking things out of one cupboard; but they are both emptied simultaneously.'

'Why don't you lock one cupboard?'

'I do, with a Bramah; but Bramah is a false god.'

'You are just as you used to be, Mavors,' returned the Canon, laughing; 'never satisfied. Before you took the best degree in your year, it might have been excusable, but now—Tutor of your College, a man said to know more about Plato——'

'*Said* to know!' broke in Mavors, with irritation; 'confound you, I *do* know more about Plato than any man alive.'

'Just think of that,' said the Canon, slily. 'On such a pinnacle, and yet not satisfied.'

'Where is the comfort of a pinnacle?' retorted the Tutor, peevishly. 'Give me a Canon's stall. For you to grumble is indeed ingratitude to fortune. You've your rooms here—the best in the College. Your house

on the Trumpington Road kept for you by a devoted sister, and ornamented by the presence of the most charming of wards. Satisfied indeed! It is my belief that if you married your ward, you wouldn't be quite content even then.'

'I am quite sure I shouldn't,' said the Canon, laughing outright; 'and I don't think Sophy would be quite content either. That's another thorn in my lot, Mavors; my responsibility as regards that girl.'

'A crumpled leaf in your bed of roses, you mean, Aldred; I wish I had such a thorn. How charmingly she makes your coffee for you! How neatly she catalogues your library!'

'I believe that is your notion of a wife's perfection, Mavors. If so, why don't *you* propose to Sophy. You shall have her guardian's full consent, I promise you; now do, *do*.'

The Rev. Henry Mavors, tutor of Trinity

College, and the terror of German commentators, blushed like a girl. Perhaps it was knowing so much about Plato that rendered the notion of marriage alarming to him, or perhaps the Canon had unconsciously touched some secret chord in his friend's breast. He saw his advantage—it was cruel of him, but he did not know how cruel—and pushed it home.

'If you are shy about it, my dear Mavors,' he continued, 'I'll speak to Sophy myself. Only you must make up your mind. You see if she asks *you*, you will hardly like to refuse a lady.'

'I don't think a lady—or at all events so young a lady—would quite appreciate a jest of that kind,' said Mr. Mavors, gravely, and still very red.

'That shows how little you know about her, my dear friend,' said the Canon, drily; 'she would enjoy it immensely.'

It was not only that, being a widower, he

was more 'at ease in Zion,' as regarded the fair sex, than his celibate friend, and spoke with a certain cynical lightness; he had in view a particular case.

'Between ourselves, my dear fellow,' he continued ('for it is a matter which I should certainly not speak about to any one but an old friend like you), our dear little Sophy is a source of great anxiety to us.'

'You don't seem to feel it so, my dear Aldred,' observed the other, with sympathetic interest; 'at all events in her company.'

'I would not let her know that I feel it for worlds; both my sister and I greatly enjoy her companionship, she is so naïve and engaging; but I can't help wishing the old Queen's Counsel had not fixed upon me for her guardian. I have not a word to say against the dear little maid, mind; but she's flighty—not to say flirty. At Portsmouth, where she last came from, it did not signify, I suppose; soldiers and sailors are not apt

to take young ladies *au sérieux*, because they mean nothing themselves; but with undergraduates it is different.'

The Tutor frowned. 'But why do you ask undergraduates—that is, such as you have any reason to disapprove of—to your house?'

'My dear fellow, Sophy asks them, not I; or rather she is the magnet that attracts them. They meet her at tennis parties, balls, and what not, and then ask leave to call.'

'Then I should not give them leave.'

'But they call in order to request the permission; and as I am always away from home, my silence is taken for consent. Sophy welcomes them, and my sister has not the heart to say "You mustn't come, sir." You see, it's very hard for the poor girl, shut up all day with Maria or an old fellow like me.'

'You're not a particularly old fellow,' observed the Tutor, with an air of irritation,

rather than of one who pays a compliment. 'A man is only as old as he feels.'

'Quite true; age, however, is a matter of comparison, and in this place of all others the contrast stands out most strongly. We call these young fellows "boys," and they call us—well, I'm sure I don't know what they call us, but "fogies," at the very least. Not, my dear fellow, that *you* look like a fogy' (for the other had drawn himself up, looking more like a major, and a drum-major too, than a college tutor); 'but you know what boys are. Well, girls are like them in their judgment on these matters, only worse.'

Mr. Mavors answered nothing, but played a tattoo with his fingers on the thrown-back window-pane.

'Yes,' continued the Canon, sadly; 'it is impossible to conceal from myself that dear little Sophy (though I do believe she is fond of him) finds her old guardian a bit of a bore, and infinitely prefers the society of a

young gentleman such as Mr. Herbert Perry, for instance.'

'Perry? Who's Perry?' inquired the Tutor.

'Well, he's a Trinity man in his third year; he is not on your "side," but, of course, you know him. He won the sculls last year.'

'A boating man! Oh, yes, I remember; a great hulking fellow, with a brown beard and a fresh complexion.'

'An excessively handsome man!'

'Indeed! I should rather call him a fine animal.'

'He is an animal, I am sorry to say, that Sophy admires very much,' returned the Canon, drily. 'I don't like him myself, nor is it altogether my prejudice. I have heard things about him—not very bad things—but things not to his credit. There is a theory that your athlete is generally a person of good moral character.'

The Tutor smiled contemptuously.

'Just so. Well, this young man is said to be no better than he should be, and also very reckless.'

'But have you no authority over your ward?'

'Authority? I can't "gate" her or "fine" her; to be sure I could "rusticate" her, but that would be very inconvenient.'

'No doubt,' said the Tutor, with an air of conviction; 'it would be too much to expect that you should leave Cambridge on her account.'

'I did leave it for a month or two last winter, and took Sophy to London. I need not go into painful details, Mavors; but the fact is that course did not produce the effect I intended. The man followed us there, and I have reason to believe that Sophy gave him some encouragement. She knows, however, that my views are fixed as regards that matter. She shall never have my consent to

marry him while I have power to forbid it—that is, until she comes of age; but in the meantime what *am* I to do?'

'Forbid him your house.'

'The effect of which would be, that she would see him *out* of the house; a flirtation is bad enough, but a clandestine flirtation is far worse. The last appeal, however, as I have said, lies with me. There is still a twelvemonth to run before she becomes her own mistress, and I am in hopes she will tire of the man before that time.'

'And then?'

'Well, then she will please herself. She has twenty thousand pounds of her own, though strictly tied up; so that she will have plenty of suitors, no doubt. In any case—even supposing, that is, her *penchant* for Mr. Perry dies out—I have no great confidence in her judgment; nothing would please me more than to see her transfer her affections to some worthy fellow (I should

not look for money in him so much as good promise) who would make her happy; but I confess I should be as much surprised as pleased. The dream of my life used to be that Sophy and my Robert—but there,' concluded the speaker, with a weary sigh, 'that's over, and much else with it.'

'That would have been a convenient arrangement, no doubt,' said the Tutor, in a tone less consoling than perfunctory; his sympathy seemed to have somehow faded out. 'I suppose the ladies will be here to-morrow evening?'

'For the procession on the Backs?—yes, certainly. You will come, of course?' The Tutor nodded. 'You will not mind my asking a few young fellows, for Sophy's sake? The more she sees the better she will be able to strike an average, and perceive how much beneath it is Mr. Perry.'

'*He* will not be here, I do hope.'

'My dear friend, he will be on the river,

of course. Do you not know that he is stroke of your own boat?'

'*My* boat!' exclaimed the Tutor, contemptuously. 'Good Heavens!'

'Well, I mean the Third Trinity: you were an Eton man yourself, were you not? You have no idea what interest we take in aquatics up at the Laurels. I believe I could tell you the place of every boat on the river.'

'Could you? I could just as soon go through the catalogue of the Kings of Israel. Oh, yes; I'll come with pleasure—but I must go now, for I have some work to do to-night;' and he took up his college cap.

'And so have I,' said the Canon.

'Is it possible?' laughed the Tutor, as he left the room. But when the door had closed upon him he grew grave enough. Even into the deep solitudes and silent cells

matters he employed an assistant. It must be confessed that, had he not done so the great work would have progressed but slowly, for the Canon was dilatory and a dilettante. When Nature said 'Dream'—a remark which, if one is inclined to listen to it, she repeats pretty often—he let Nature have her way. He would sit for hours with his book before him, with his head propped on his hand, one upright finger pressed upon his cheek, and with his thoughts a hundred miles away; indeed much further, for they were with his boy in India.

He had everything about him suitable to intellectual activity; every description of note-book, piles of volumes of reference; a desk with a sea of papers on it, and a noble harbour for his knees beneath it. But a large tin of Latakia tobacco stood beside him, which, though it may stimulate the imagination, is hardly a spur to toil; and a huge meerschaum pipe, which required a pretty constant hand to it, or

CHAPTER II.

THE SCHOLAR.

'My work,' Canon Aldred was wont to observe in his pleasant way, 'like topmost Gargarus, takes the morning;' but, as Mr. Mavors had hinted, it was not a severe description of labour, and could be done at any time. He was just now engaged upon a new edition of his favourite poet, Milton, including a Concordance; and, like all men who have little to do, thought it a matter not only of vast importance, but of pressing necessity. It did not strike him that for what people had done without for a few centuries, such as a concordance to Milton, they could very well wait a little longer, and in order to expedite

over it now, and softly murmurs to himself:—

> It lies before me there, and my own breath
> Might stir its outer threads as though beside
> The living head I stood in honoured pride,
> Talking of lovely things, that conquer death.
> Perhaps he pressed it once, or underneath
> Ran his five fingers, when he leant blank eyed,
> And saw in fancy Adam and his bride,
> With their rich locks.

This lock, I need hardly say, was from the head of the Canon's literary idol, Milton; but there was scarcely anything on which his eye lit which did not suggest some poetical quotation: and when there was nothing to suggest them they suggested themselves. Though without any ear for music, he had a voice exquisitely modulated, and gave exactly the right expression to every word. He was no scholar, like his friend the Tutor, but a man of very various reading, who valued literature for what it was worth, and not (as is generally the case with scholars) for the name of the author. He had many fine

things in his head with which few others were acquainted, and would 'croon' them (as the poor 'Shepherd' used to term it) to himself, for the gratification of his inward ear.

As he passes by the open window in this tour around his chamber, he once more looks out of it. The dusk of eve has fallen; the river has lost its fairy fleet; and only one or two figures are still threading the lime-walk. Something in the scene suggests an old-world time and tune:—

Masters of Colleges have no common graces,
And they that have fellowships have but common places,
And those that scholars are, they must have handsome faces.
Alas! poor scholar, whither wilt thou go?

'That must have been a strange way to preferment,' he muses. 'A handsome face!' Then, as a step comes up the echoing stair outside his chambers, 'My poor Adair,' he adds, 'would have had small chance in those days.'

There is a modest knock at the inner door (for the outer, of course, was open), and his own gentle voice replies, 'Come in.' The new-comer was a young man of twenty-two or so; and since he was a scholar of his College, it was clear, as the other had just said, that he owed it to his learning, and not to his looks. He was tall and thin—of a leanness, indeed, that almost approached emaciation. He had dark hair, the length and straightness of which made him appear even more lantern-jawed than he really was. His face, so far from having the hue of youth, though it was not unhealthy-looking, was destitute of colour. His teeth, however, were good; and his black eyes, though somewhat downcast, very clear and bright.

'I fear I am rather late, Canon,' he said, in a voice as soft as a woman's, and with a deep respect that had yet no touch of sycophancy; 'but I had not kept my chapels, and——'

'Don't mention it, my dear lad, put in the other, with a friendly smile. 'The Church has the first call on all of us. I hardly think, however, that that phrase, "keeping your chapels" conveys the full feeling of ecclesiastical devotion with which you are, no doubt, possessed. Have you done the B's yet?'

'Yes, sir.' The young man drew from under his gown some MSS., and put them into the other's hand.

'That's well, my lad; how neatly you do everything! How I envy you that gift of deftness! When it comes to me (this with a whimsical smile), it will not be of the fingers. At my own christening, I do believe the Fairy Disorder was left altogether out of the Programme, and revenged herself by never leaving me since. Well, and how do you like it?'

'Very much, sir. It is, in the first place, a very great pleasure to find myself useful

to you in any way; and, after all, nothing but care and accuracy are required in the matter.'

'Nay, I didn't mean the Concordance,' said the Canon, smiling. 'I meant the poet himself. I gathered from what you said that you have had hitherto but a bowing acquaintance with him.'

'That is true. You see I have not had much time for reading such things.'

'Such things!' echoed the Canon. 'And now you have read it?'

'Well, sir, there seem to be a great many B's in "Paradise Lost."'

'There are, are there?' returned the other with an amused look. 'And as for the poetry, I suppose you agree with the famous Johnian that there is "a good deal of assertion in it, and very little proof?"'

'Indeed, sir, I find no proof at all. And how unequally he has divided the thing. In the Eighth Book there are not 640 lines,

while in the Tenth there are no less than 1,104.'

The Canon looked at his young companion with that sort of gentle pity with which a kind-hearted person regards a blind man.

'What was the book you liked best when you were quite a boy?' he inquired, after a long pause.

'Euclid, sir.'

'You will be Senior Wrangler, my good fellow, as sure as your name's Adair,' ejaculated the Canon. His tone had something of warning and even menace in it, as though he had said, 'If you don't take care, young man, you will go straight to the devil;' but the speaker was quite unconscious of it: he intended what he said for a compliment, and the other took it as such.

'It is a pleasure to hear you say so, sir,' he replied, with a quick flush; 'but if my success depends on my name being Adair, I

shall not be a Wrangler at all. My name is —or was—Burke.'

'Then why did you change it?' inquired the Canon, with mild surprise. He knew it was not for the usual reason—an inheritance —for Adair was a sizar, and far from rich.

'To please a patron, Sir Charles Adair.'

The bitterness of the young man's tone was excessive; if you could have seen his eyes, which, however, were bent down, you would have read in them more than bitterness —hate. The Canon's handsome face softened like a girl's. 'A patron,' he said; 'a patron may, however, be also a friend.'

'This one is not, or rather was not,' replied the young man, curtly. 'I have done with him, or, as I should perhaps put it, he has done with me.'

'And have you no other friend?' inquired the Canon, gently.

'No friend but you, sir. My parents are dead; they left me nothing but a name, and

that'—here he uttered a sharp sigh, as it seemed involuntarily—'has been taken away from me.'

'Your present name, however, will one day be known irrespectively of him who gave it you,' said the Canon, encouragingly. 'I hear from your tutor that great things are expected of you. You will achieve reputation—fame.'

'And independence,' added the young man, vehemently.

'No doubt of it. To a young man of character' (the Canon was thinking of his own son) 'dependence is thraldom. Nature herself points out to him his way in the world. But I gathered from what you said that you and your patron had parted company.'

'So we have. What I have now to gain is a competence.'

'Oh, I see! *That* sort of independence,' returned the other drily.

The young man looked amazed; then as

one who, having lost his way, hits suddenly on what he believes to be the right track, he answered eagerly, 'Do not think me mercenary, sir! You do not know what poverty is.'

'Quite true, quite true,' said the Canon, touched by the other's tone. 'I am no judge in such a case as yours.'

'Moreover, it is my earnest desire to free myself from the sense of an obligation that has become intolerable.'

'Ah, you want to pay this too generous gentleman the money back that he has expended on you.'

The scholar bowed his head assentingly: if his intention was to have made a favourable impression on his companion he had certainly succeeded; there was no need for him to speak.

'May I ask without impertinence—indeed, I have a reason for it—the cause of quarrel between you and Sir Charles?'

'It is only natural that you should do so, sir,' answered the young man gravely. 'If I

do not answer your question you must not imagine that I am ashamed to do so. I am not afraid of any inquiry ; but,' here he turned scarlet, ' it was a private matter.'

' That means there was a lady in the case, I suppose,' said the Canon, smiling.

' Yes, sir ; I was very ill-treated.'

' And not by *her*, I dare say,' smiled the Canon. ' Well, my lad, we cannot all get what we want in this world, and as often as not it is better for us that we should not. I cannot say,' he continued in a changed tone, ' how pleased I am with your assistance in my present work. You seem to me to be the very helpmate I have been looking for. I was verifying what you had done only last night, and did not detect a single error. I do not think that the remuneration we agreed upon is a sufficient recompense for such care and accuracy. I propose to double it.'

' Oh, sir, you are too generous.'

' Tchut, tchut ! the benefit is mutual ;

you may be sure I keep the whole matter secret, as before. Nor need I add that what you have just confided to me about your own affairs will go no further.'

He spoke so rapidly that it was impossible for the other to interpose a word of thanks, but his face glowed with pleasure.

'By-the-bye, you are not in the boats, are you?'

'Oh, no, sir.' The words were spoken with a cold smile, which might have almost been translated, 'How should I be, since I have neither time nor money for such things?'

'Then you must join us here to-morrow night. We shall have a little party to see the procession—my sister and my ward—I think I hear them this moment on the staircase; they often come to fetch me home.'

While he was yet speaking the door opened, and two ladies entered the room. The elder, a tall woman of about five-and-

forty, very thin and angular, but with an air of singular refinement and delicacy; the younger, a slight, fairy-like little creature, exquisitely pretty, and with a face that sparkled with expression; her hair was golden, and her eyes were hazel. But it was not at once that you noticed any such detail; her other charms were lost in her brightness.

'My dear guardian,' she exclaimed, 'we are late, I know, but do not scold Aunt Maria, it was all my fault; for after chapel——' Here she stopped, catching sight of the young scholar.

'A friend of mine, Mr. Adair, my dear Maria.' There was something in the tone of her brother's introduction which caused Miss Aldred to graciously hold out her hand instead of bowing.

'Mr. Adair, my ward, Miss Gilbert.'

The girl inclined herself stiffly towards him with what was very literally scant courtesy—and while looking straight in his face

contrived to convey the impression that she was unconscious of his presence. Notwithstanding all which signs and tokens, 'I have had the pleasure of meeting Miss Gilbert before,' said Mr. John Adair, and at the same time stepped forward and held out his hand to her.

The delicate pink faded from Miss Sophy's cheek in a moment, leaving it all lily ; it was evidently an unexpected rejoinder ; but she took the proffered hand frankly enough, and in her bright musical voice replied, 'I beg you a thousand pardons. I remember you now quite well. We met at the Bachelors' Ball, I think.'

'Well, I am surprised, Adair,' said the Canon. 'I should have thought a ball-room was the very last place you would have been found in. However, I am glad to find you are not such a stranger as I thought you were. It is hardly necessary to say you will not forget your engagement for to-morrow night; a

man who can do cube roots in his head should never forget anything.'

'You over-estimate my memory, sir,' said the scholar, smiling; 'but' (here he glanced at the young lady) 'I rarely forget what I wish to remember.'

'I hope you don't repeat all you remember,' said Miss Sophy, lightly, 'or an evening with you and my dear guardian would be a little trying.'

It was a flippant speech for a young girl, but it was generally admitted that Miss Sophy *was* flippant. The Canon, whose habits of quotation had been thus sarcastically alluded to, only smiled and shook his head.

'You need not be afraid of my repeating anything, Miss Gilbert,' said the young scholar, gravely; and, backing to the door, he bowed, and left the room.

'You've frightened that young man very much, Sophy,' remarked her guardian, reprovingly; 'he is a mathematician, and takes

everything seriously, even your pert little jokes.'

'I'm so sorry,' replied the girl, with a pretence of penitence; and running up to her guardian, she gave him an affectionate kiss.

You could never have guessed from her manner what was the actual fact—that, so far from frightening Mr. John Adair, that gentleman had frightened *her* to the verge of a fainting fit.

CHAPTER III.

GENERAL HOMAGE.

CANON ALDRED was a man of mark in Cambridge, and the more so since his ways were not Cambridge ways. As a University man, he had not much distinguished himself; his friends said he could easily have done so had he not wasted his mental energies in so many directions; but others had their doubts of this. We often hear it said of notorious swindlers that if they had shown in some honest calling one-half of the ability they displayed in embezzlement, or some other branch of the criminal sciences, they could have earned a competence, or even wealth; but this is only one of those platitudes which

commonplace people make use of under the impression that they are saying something philosophic. The remark is of a piece with that which describes a first-rate whist-player as a mathematician spoilt. The truth is, many men have natural gifts, for particular things, which are nevertheless only small things; they are very good in the back streams of intelligence, but the main stream is too strong for them, and in reality they exhibit their sagacity in keeping out of it. Some men, again, do many things well, but still not very well. If they were women, they would draw and paint and play the piano, and even read Dante (not with very much pleasure) in the original; and they would be called 'accomplished.' An accomplished man, however, is not a desirable person; whereas the folks I have in my mind are generally very agreeable. Their sympathies, though not deep, are wide; they have neither cant nor caste; they see the Beautiful and the

True, but without attempting to define them, and they are almost always good-natured.

Canon Aldred was all this, and more. He was kind-hearted to a fault; confiding to the verge of weakness; and a gentleman to the core. Though not wealthy, he had some private property which, with the Canonry, gave him a considerable income, and he spent it generously. He was not an Amphytrion, because he had not the means for it, but he entertained his friends with a hospitality the graciousness of which atoned for any lack of splendour; and his friends were of various kinds. Some of them were now staying at Cambridge, drawn thither, as much by the attraction of his presence as by those of the place itself, great as they are during the May term.

There was Professor Pelski, of Moscow, though not 'late' of Moscow; he had had to fly for his life from Russia on account of his

political opinions more than thirty years ago, and during that time had been hand and glove with half the Revolutionists of Europe.

There was Mr. Flit; the most special of special correspondents, whose vacations could never be called 'long,' since they only lasted while England was not at war with this or that savage tribe or country; at the first beat of the drum he was off, with his note-book and metallic pencil, to Timbuctoo or Terra del Fuego, but in the meantime mingled in society as though privation had never driven him to eat anything worse than his boots.

There was also just now in Cambridge Mr. Fluker, the great Eastern financier; the Canon had met him in Egypt when engaged in one of his most successful 'operations' upon the Khedive, and found him much to his taste. Mr. Fluker's experiences had all the charm of novelty for him, and with characteristic modesty he felt a considerable respect for this man who had made his mark—which was,

however, a pretty big hole for the reception of other people's property—in a world of which he himself knew nothing. And Mr. Fluker, to whom the respect of a fellow creature was an unaccustomed treat, reciprocated the other's liking.

All these gentlemen had received invitations to view the 'procession' from the Canon's rooms; but it did not include any suggestion that they should attend the College chapel. He had asked them to do that upon another occasion, thinking that the peculiarity of the scene might have an attraction for them; but 'the vespers,' as Mr. Flit entitled them, had not, so far as these gentlemen were concerned, been a success. As guests of the Canon they had all occupied prominent places in the stalls, but without a due understanding of the sublimity or responsibilities of that exalted position. It was probably the first time that Mr. Fluker had been to a place of worship since his baptism

(if he ever *had* been baptised ; for there were persons ready and willing to affirm that he had not only no right to the surname he bore, but to even a Christian name). The service had seemed not a little tedious to him, and he had not scrupled to show it as demonstratively as the pins, and rings, and watch-chain of which it was his habit to make particular display.

Mr. Flit, on the other hand, who on principle never suffered himself to be bored by anything, had been too much at home in the sacred edifice, and not only at anthem time (wherein some little license is allowed to wandering thought), but during the more devotional portions of the proceedings, had been seen, to the great amusement of the undergraduates, to take copious notes, including a very graphic sketch of the Vice-Master.

As to Professor Pelski (who was not only a philosopher himself but took every one else to be so), he had not scrupled to address

aloud to his neighbour, the junior Dean himself (a person he rightly judged likely to be cognisant of such matters), questions respecting the date and foundation of the chapel; the carving by Grindling Gibbons, and other matters of information which seemed to him more interesting than what was going on.

The college authorities, in short, had been rather scandalised by the Canon's friends, and had made a remonstrance to him in private against the future admittance to Divine service of individuals who, although of European celebrity, the Master had not hesitated to term 'outlandish persons.' The Canon had expressed his sorrow, with the confident assurance that his friends were not likely to come to chapel again; but it was not the first time that the latitude of his views had met with discouragement.

During the last winter but one he had asked three Parsee students, who had just joined the University, to dine with him at his

Under these circumstances it may seem somewhat strange that Miss Aldred and Miss Gilbert were the only ladies ; but, by the nature of the case, the male sex at Cambridge is greatly in excess of the female : on occasions like the present almost every 'don' who had rooms commanding the view had his own lady visitors ; and, lastly, it was not Sophy's custom (to please whom the little party had been given) to welcome casual guests of her own sex, and especially of her own age, very warmly. She was very fond of admiration, and the truth is, ladies did not admire her so much as gentlemen did, and if they had, she would not have cared, perhaps, quite so much for it. We all know what men think of 'a ladies' man,' and ladies, on their parts, do not take very kindly to ladies who monopolise the attention of gentlemen. Men adored Sophy Gilbert. A little beauty goes a great way with them, and if, in addition, there is a marked kindness towards themselves it goes

much further; and Sophy *was* very pretty, and very *empressée* with every one of them. She was not a flirt; for a flirt is an artificial production full of wiles and stratagems—warm, when warmth seems necessary to bring on the flower of Love, and cold when that eccentric plant seems to require the contrary treatment to produce the same result; full of airs and graces that can be put on or off at a moment's notice; prompt with her tears or with her smiles, significant, yet utterly meaningless. It is my fixed opinion that no intelligent man has been deceived by a flirt for more than twenty-four hours, and much less been what is termed 'jilted.' Now, when Sophy smiled she meant it; if she didn't mean much, her manner, however tender, was genuine, though, so to speak, very transferable; she was kind, but naturally kind.

Masters of Colleges unbent before her, and quoted what she knew were compliments, though they were in Latin; tutors retained

her hand almost as long as though it had been that of some young nobleman just entrusted to their educational care; grave professors paid her as much attention as though she was the subject of the morrow's lecture. The undergraduates raved about her. When she came to chapel every one felt glad that they were conforming to college regulations, and had not played truant. Their eyes did not roam about as usual, but were concentrated upon one point—the stall in which she sat. The anthem was interlarded with eulogies upon her.

Tompkins, the great orator of the Union, and famous for his original sallies, declared that it was a liberal education to look at her. Many gay young gentlemen whose fate would have otherwise been doubtful, were said to have lost their degrees because of her; and Jones, who was Senior Wrangler, always protested that he had lost the Smith's Prize on account of the recollection of her charming

face suddenly flashing between him and a problem.

With the less serious minded, 'the boys that crashed the glass and beat the floor,' she was a standing toast. To have the *entrée* to 'The Laurels' was a privilege more desired by the undergraduate world than to win a declamation prize, or a cup on the river. And yet there were people who wondered why Sophy Gilbert was 'not more popular than she was with girls of her own age in Cambridge.'

Professor Pelski, who might have been her grandfather, was a very open admirer of Sophy's. 'My dear young lady,' he said, in his broken English, as she held out her hand to him and gaily inquired after his rheumatism, 'I was very bad when I came; but the sight of you "makes," as your Wordsworth says, "an old man young." When I look on your ward, Canon, I declare it almost makes me forget to think of Liberty!'

'You exchange the general for the particular, eh?' said the Canon; 'instead of Liberty, you think of a special license.'

'Really, William, you ought to be ashamed of yourself,' exclaimed Miss Maria, reprovingly.

'What does he mean?' inquired the Professor.

Mr. Flit was equally well received, and not only paid the young lady some pretty compliments, but went so far as to compare her favourably, in his own mind, with a certain fair Circassian who had once pursued him for twenty miles over the mountain with rifle and yataghan; but who, in his own account of the affair—which was a well-worn topic—had anything but hostile intentions.

Mr. Fluker, who was not eloquent with ladies, contented himself with a few commonplaces; and while regarding her with distant looks of admiration, jingled the sovereigns in

his pocket as if he would have liked to buy her.

Mr. Mavors, too, sat apart; for though much more a man of the world (as, indeed, he might easily have been) than his host, he had not his extensive human sympathies, and did not much relish the companionship of persons who had never so much as heard of the Stagyrite, or might have even imagined it was a species of beetle. He confined his attentions for the present to Miss Maria, as being near the rose (for did not Miss Sophy always call her aunt?) if not the rose herself.

The younger fellows, who had at first modestly hung around the door (like the people who have been asked to join a dinner-party after dinner—or, as it is euphemistically termed, are 'received in the evening'), gradually clustered about the window at which Sophy sat, like bees about a flower.

As the Canon afterwards remarked, with a smile that robbed the observation of its satire, 'My rooms were only on the first floor, but Sophy was in the seventh heaven.'

CHAPTER IV.

RUSSIAN MORALS.

PRESENTLY there is a sound of cheering and the distant dip of oars, and Sophy, with a little blush, cried 'Here they come!'

'Now, I should like to know all about this,' inquired Professor Pelski, in his queer English. 'What is it, this procession?'

'At the conclusion of the races,' explained Sophy, 'the boats come up the river in the order of their places, and assemble together opposite King's College, yonder.'

'Third Trinity is head of the river,' observed a shy young fellow as a supplement to this information.

'Third Trinity; then there is more than

one Trinity?' exclaimed the Professor. 'I shall never get to the bottom of this.'

'Trinity has three boats, sir,' continued the shy young man; 'the Third Trinity is a club composed of Eton men.'

'Eaten men? This is worse and worse.'

'Men that have been brought up at Eton College, sir.'

'Ha, ha; I have it now; Eton scholars. Good: it's a nice boat; but very thin and rickety. What a leetle, leetle man they have got to steer them; and how he bob his head into that big, big one.'

'Stroke is a heavy fellow for his place,' observes Mr. Flit, who has the advantage of an opera-glass. He likes to see everything thoroughly, and thinks the procession may make a 'par' in his paper in the dead season. 'Why the deuce does he wear flowers in his straw hat? It isn't May Day.'

'It is the custom on procession night,' ex-

plains the young gentleman who had undertaken the post of chorus.

'They are very powerful young men,' continued the Professor, admiringly. He has borrowed the glass from Mr. Flit. 'In my own country we do not develop' [he pronounced it devil up] 'the physique except at billiards. Mr. Stroke is particularly handsome.'

'His name is not Stroke,' recommenced the chorus; 'that is the term given——'

'Why he is taking off his hat and waving to us!' exclaimed the Professor, excitedly.

'They are all doing it,' says Sophy, gently.

'No, no; but he—just take the glass and look at him—who is it?'

The moment was an embarrassing one for the young lady. She knew perfectly well who was waving his hat to her, and had her own reasons for not being grateful for the attention. This circumstance, which, thanks

to the assistance science afforded to the eyesight, had attracted the observation of the Professor, seemed to have escaped the rest of the company. She took the glass, but purposely turned it on the wrong boat. 'I have not the pleasure of the gentleman's acquaintance,' she said, indifferently.

'It is Mr. Perry whom the Professor means,' said a quiet voice behind her.

She did not look round, but she recognised the voice as that of the young scholar whom she had met the previous day. Her face turned crimson, but she said nothing.

'That is "pink Perry" who won the sculls,' remarked the chorus, emboldened by his previous successes, and conscious of the possession of peculiar information. 'He is the greatest athlete in the University, can drain a pewter without drawing a single breath, and pick up coins with his toes.'

'It strikes me that the gentleman is not

so much an athlete as an acrobat,' observed the Canon, drily.

As for the rest, they kept a terrible silence; the shy young fellow wished himself dumb or dead; every one stared out of the window at the individual to whom had been attributed these great physical gifts.

The boats were now crowded together, and one had put off from the shore, bearing a hospitable youth with a huge flagon of claret-cup for the refreshment of his aquatic friends. He offered it to 'pink Perry' (so called from his ruddy complexion) who, before drinking, cast that sort of glance up at the Canon's windows which vulgar landsmen use when they say 'I looks toward you.'

'What spirits he has!' exclaimed the Professor, waving his hand with enthusiasm; the whole affair began to have the charm for him of a political demonstration.

'Spirits indeed!' murmured the special correspondent, contemptuously: 'he is very,

very drunk ; that's what's the matter with that young man.'

Mr. Fluker was wondering in his mind whether he should make a good impression by throwing a handful of sovereigns among the crowd beneath, but fortunately decided in the negative.

Presently, to Sophy's intense relief, the procession moved on towards King's College, whence the cheering and the tumult came mellowed by distance. She was sorry that she had ever come to see the triumph of the Third Trinity. To most people in the room, it was true, nothing seemed to have happened that was very serious. It was not unusual on such occasions for the hero of the hour to be a little 'excited;' and though it had not been 'good form' in Mr. Perry to pay such marked attention to the Canon's guests, his libation, to most eyes, seemed to have had no particular object. Sophy, however, knew better; and was well aware that her guardian

and Aunt Maria, and at least one other member of the company, knew better also—namely, that her health had been drunk in a very demonstrative manner in public by Mr. Herbert Perry. How could he, *could* he, do so, knowing how unpopular he was with her folk at home!

In crediting him with such recklessness, however, she did him wrong; for the fact was, Mr. Perry was not quite conscious of his own audacity. He was not, as Mr. Flit had concluded, 'very, very drunk,' but he had taken, that afternoon, as much champagne as was good even for the stroke oar of the leading boat on the river, and more than was good for a young gentleman 'on his promotion,' anxious to do away with certain prejudices entertained against him by the guardians of his beloved object.

Sophy knew by the Canon's manner that he was greatly annoyed, and when they adjourned into another apartment for refresh-

ments, she became aware that Mr. Mavors, who took her in, was annoyed also. His manner had been always something more than polite to her, and now there was a certain stiffness in it, as though he suspected her of having encouraged the attentions which had evidently scandalised him.

It was characteristic of the young lady that, far from resenting this as an impertinence, or as not his business, she took it as a compliment; it proved indeed that it *was* his business, or, in other words, that the Tutor took a personal interest in her; and there were very few men under such circumstances, whom, being angry with her, she could not have pacified. If Miss Sophy did not understand Plato she understood people who did understand him, and in five minutes, thanks to her pleasant way with him (which indeed was as natural to her as its song to the nightingale), Mr. Mavors had quite acquitted her of any connivance at Mr. Perry's mis-

doings. She would have got on with him even better if Mr. Adair had not taken his seat on the other side of her; she did not know that the Canon had kindly motioned him into it (wishing to remove any sense of inferiority that might have arisen from the consciousness of his being the only undergraduate present), and she thought his propinquity an intrusion, which nevertheless, for reasons of her own, she dared not resent. Though he spoke very little, it struck her that he listened with unnecessary attention to what she said to others; a compliment that for once by no means pleased her; indeed, it gave her a sense of discomfort, and even oppression. Fortunately, she was not called upon to talk very much, 'the guests of the evening,' as those not members of the University might naturally be considered, taking the lion's share of the conversation.

It was a joke amongst his college friends against the Canon, who knew everybody,

including some foreigners of very 'advanced opinions,' that he used to remark in his quiet way in the combination room, 'There will be a rising in Hungary about the middle of June,' or 'They will shoot at the Czar again in August' (as though he were game); and now that one of these queer friends of his, a real, live Revolutionist, had come *in propriâ persona*, there was more than one of the company desirous to draw him out.

On two topics in particular—Liberty and Patriotism—Professor Pelski was by no means a badger as regards any unwillingness to be 'drawn,' but, on the contrary, only required to be set agoing.

'I will tell you a story of two brothers,' he said, 'illustrative of the state of things under the Tyrant Alexander, and as they at present exist in the city—let us say of Cracow: I dare not tell you the real names of either places or people.'

'He can't pronounce them,' muttered Mr.

Flit to Mr. Fluker; 'that's his real difficulty; no Russian and still less any Polish name *can* be pronounced: I know both countries well.'

'If you will allow me, gentlemen,' continued the Professor (who had often lectured upon his country's wrongs, and already conceived himself upon his legs in the company of a couple of candles and a glass of water; his English at once became less broken, the English of the platform), 'I will call the two brothers John and James.'

'Why not X and Y?' suggested the Canon; 'there are so few things, we flatter ourselves, unknown at Cambridge that they are sufficiently indicated by those letters.'

'Very good. X and Y, then, were two brothers, Poles, but very different in their character.'

The Canon smiled. He was thinking to himself, 'We have a proverb to that effect, "as far asunder as the Poles."'

'X was a patriot—revolutionist, if you

will; and I need not add, since he was not in prison, an exile. Y was a quiet, wealthy fellow, who took no part in politics, and lived at home. He felt, however, a desire for a holiday, and asked permission of his friend the Military Governor to take one in foreign parts.

'"Good!" he said. "You may go; but no further west than Ostend. Such are the conditions of your permission, remember."

'Now after a little, Y found Ostend uncommonly dull, and wrote across to X, who was in England, saying, "Do you think it would be safe for me to come across and look at you?" X wrote back to say, "Quite safe, if you come under a feigned name. If you decide on that, I will meet you at Dover." And he did so.

'Y had no political aspirations, but from the necessity of the case he became acquainted with his brother's friends, who were all lovers of Freedom. After a pleasant stay in London,

finding that he had still time to spare, Y ran over to Paris, and, still furnished with introductions from his brother, enjoyed himself there also; and then returned for the last few days of his holiday to Ostend, whence he went back on the appointed day to Cracow.

'On the very day after his arrival the Military Governor sent for him. He was, as I have said, a friend of his; he had often entertained him at dinner, and knew his foibles; but he was a martinet in politics, and poor Y's heart sank to his boots at the thoughts of the approaching interview. The General received him in a very different manner from that with which he had parted with him; his face was stern, and his tone severe and distant.

'"So, sir," he said, "you have returned from your holiday."

'Y rubbed his hands and smiled feebly.

'"You didn't break your word—your solemn promise to his Imperial Majesty

by going further west than Ostend, of course?"

'Poor Y, who was not a courageous man, murmured something that the other took for a negation: "That's strange," rejoined the General, grimly, "because in this report here," and he turned over an official document, "I find that you left Ostend for England under a feigned name. On the 15th of last month you landed at Dover, where that villanous revolutionist, your brother, met you. Not content with this act of falsehood and disobedience, you made the acquaintance of that firebrand Mazzini, and were introduced in the House of Commons to that devil Palmerston. Even this was not sufficient, but you must needs cross to Paris, where you consorted with the most inveterate enemies of his Imperial Majesty. How do you account for all this?"

'"General," said poor Y, "the meeting with those people you mention was purely

accidental, but I have done very wrong. The fact is, I was induced to go to London with the intention of making the acquaintance of your national painter, Rashkin, three of whose unrivalled works you yourself possess, and whom I understood to be residing in that capital. My object was to purchase a picture from him, that my house might boast at least one ornament similar to those you possess, and which I am sure must be worth 6,000 roubles apiece at the very least. But Raskhin was ill, and had no picture to sell, so that, as often happens, I transgressed to no purpose."

'"I think my pictures are worth more than 6,000 roubles apiece," said the General, thoughtfully.

'"I would give 7,000 for them," said Y, eagerly.

'"You shall have them at that price," said the Governor. "By-the-bye, when you went to London, notwithstanding your promise to the contrary given to me as the representative

of his Imperial Majesty, did you see any fine horses ?"

'"Many, General; but none, I think, equal to the pair you are in the habit of driving."

'"And what do you think they are worth?" inquired the General.

'"Eight thousand roubles at the very least."

'"Perhaps you would give 9,000 for them ?"

'"With pleasure," said Y; and he never spoke a truer word. He had expended 21,000 roubles for three daubs of pictures, and 9,000 for two very indifferent nags; but there was no further danger of his going to Siberia. Such is the way,' observed the Professor in conclusion, 'in which justice is administered in my unfortunate country. What is *your* view?'

As his eyes chanced to light upon Mr. Fluker, that eminent financier thought himself called upon to make a suggestion.

'It is just possible,' he said, 'that X gave the information to the Governor, and went halves in the—the—operation.'

'What! betray his brother!' exclaimed the Professor, throwing up his hands in horror.

'I didn't say he did it,' returned Mr. Fluker, apologetically; 'but human nature is human nature, you know.'

A titter ran round the table.

'Setting aside the morals of the question,' remarked Mr. Mavors, 'the Governor might, after all, have done worse, for he might have sent the man to Siberia.'

'The moral of the case, as far as the Governor was concerned,' said Adair, 'seems to be that when you have got somebody's secret, you should make the most out of it you can.'

He spoke in a low voice, like one who makes a reflection rather than an observation; but Sophy heard him, and the blood fled from

her cheeks. She began to hate this young man, whom she had only seen the previous evening in her uncle's room—and on one other occasion.

CHAPTER V.

STRANDED.

It is the instinct of most persons when they stand in fear of a fellow-creature to avoid his society as much as is consistent with the concealment of their dislike; but though Sophy Gilbert was stricken with a great fear of John Adair, she adopted the contrary course. Without any sudden withdrawal of her attention to Mr. Mavors she dexterously transferred it to her other neighbour, and laid herself out to please him. In a man's case this would have been impossible; to most women it would have been difficult; but to Sophy it was comparatively easy. Youth and Beauty were on her side; but, powerful auxiliaries

though they were, they would hardly have served her turn with him she had to deal with had she possessed them only. Fortunately for her—or, as it seemed to her for the present, for who can tell whether that which looks like luck to-day may not turn out to be disaster to-morrow?—she had, as we have said (not the art, for it was nature with her, but), the gift of pleasing.

To please John Adair, however, was not the light task she had found it to be with other young men. There were certain initial difficulties to surmount. To gaze up in his sharp hatchet face, while his keen suspicious eyes were riveted upon her own, and then to be winsome, and even playful, was a trial to what in a more mature and less attractive girl would have been termed her 'temper.' She felt that he had a prejudice against her, and guessed the reason. On the occasion when she had first met him, she had been witness to the wounding of his *amour propre*;

nay, had even been indirectly the cause of it; and Mr. John Adair, though there were some who thought him wanting in delicacy of mind, as regarded other people, was extremely sensitive to any slight to his own proper person.

What had happened to him on the occasion in question had been somewhat more than a slight. Moreover, he had not forgotten that on the previous evening Miss Sophy Gilbert had made an attempt to ignore his acquaintance. We have seen how promptly he had prevented her doing so; but, though conscious of his success in that little matter, he was by no means satisfied with it. He still felt that he owed her something, and was resolved to pay her out—that is to say, he had been so resolved until she began to make herself agreeable to him. Then his hostile intentions gradually vanished away.

At first he despised himself for such weakness (for he was fully conscious of it), and, calling to mind the indignity he had

suffered through her, fortified himself against her with its remembrance; but presently this wormwood lost its bitterness; he reflected that what had happened had not been her fault, though it had occurred in her presence, and finally persuaded himself not only that she regretted it as much as he did (which was the fact), but regretted it on his account. It may be imagined perhaps that to have worked this revolution Miss Sophy must have talked divinely; but this was not so; she could talk very well, or, at all events, very agreeably, but on this occasion she did nothing of the kind; she listened to him divinely.

As a rule, this young man was reticent; not from any cautiousness of disposition—far from it, he was audacious even to recklessness, though, indeed, he had not much to lose—but from the circumstances of his position. He had come up to the University a sizar, a proof of his not having a superabundance of this

world's goods, and what he had had been given to him (as he himself bitterly expressed it) out of charity. He had been adopted by a wealthy baronet, Sir Charles Adair, and, but for certain proceedings of his own, would have been better provided for: nor had he quarrelled with his patron, or found much fault with his own position, till he had forfeited his favour. Having lost it, however, he was in no mood to caress the hand that had fed him, or, in truth, any hand. Instead of blaming himself for what had happened, he blamed the world at large, which to his eyes had regarded him with scorn as a dependent, and still so regarded him as a poor man. What above all things moved him was the contempt of women, to which, as worshippers of rank and position, he deemed himself especially subject. Under these circumstances, it is not surprising that in society he was retiring, and at heart morose.

He had, indeed, accepted the Canon's in-

vitation willingly enough, partly for the opportunity it afforded him of becoming acquainted with his superiors in social position, and of asserting his own, but chiefly with the object of humiliating the girl who, as he thought, had humiliated *him*. It had been his intention to say little and to hear much, but, as it happened, the very contrary had taken place; and he found himself talking to the object of his previous dislike and rancour with an eloquence which (though he had a very good opinion of his own wits) astonished himself.

He had not, of course, much small talk at his command, for small talk, like the mince-meat of yesterday's joint, is mostly composed of something that has recently been presented to our attention; and of what happened in society he knew next to nothing; his topic was chiefly that which, when two persons converse, has an unfailing interest for at least one of the parties—self; and in this case it

seemed to have an equal interest for the other. He drew a pathetic picture of his early youth, in which imagination was not wanting; he painted his natural disposition and talents in rainbow hues, and the state of dependence in which he had been plunged in the colours of eclipse; he described not only his aspirations, but the confidence which he felt in their realisation. The young lady saw him, he would have had her infer, in a chrysalis state, but in a very little while she would behold him in a very different condition; the wand of his own genius (chiefly, however, mathematical) would presently effect a marvellous transformation.

Sophy, though far from a hypocrite, possessed in a high degree that gift of her sex which enables them to affect an interest in matters that they do not care one halfpenny about; and which no man could listen to under the same circumstances without exhibiting some sign of boredom. He spoke of

his prospects in the coming tripos, and her pretty face seemed to glow with excitement; he discoursed of his college experiences, and from the rapt attention with which she listened to him, one would have thought he was speaking of her last partner or her first ball. She was, in truth, far from being charmed, and thought him a very egotistic young man; but his talk was not altogether disagreeable to her, since she saw through it the admiration she had excited in him; a thing always agreeable to her, and to which, in the present case, there was added a sense of triumph: she had manufactured a friend out of an enemy.

It was curious to contrast the young scholar's crude views of University affairs with those of the Canon, who was explaining them for the edification of his non-collegiate guests. He had a very happy way of making dull things pleasant, and of stating facts without producing that impression of weari-

ness which in most cases is so inseparable from the receipt of information. Through both the merits and the defects of his intellect he had no great sympathy with collegiate training, but he was loyal to the core, and when speaking of it to outsiders was not quite so candid as when arguing with his friend Mavors upon the same topic; he gave it as much rose-colour as the paint-box of his conscience would permit. Being well aware that what is conventionally urged against the system is the narrowness of its aims, he especially combated that theory, and dwelt upon the variety of callings to which a classical education adapts itself. He gave one illustration in particular which especially delighted Mr. Flit.

'At one of our college meetings,' he said, 'we had an application from a non-resident Fellow for his yearly dividend in advance, upon the ground that he had recently been appointed chief of a certain savage tribe, and

had just declared war against a neighbouring island.'

'Where was the island?' inquired Mr. Flit, who wanted to know the details of everything, not necessarily for immediate publication, but for his note-book.

'I don't know the latitude, my dear sir, though there always *is* a latitude in these stories,' said the Canon, smiling; 'but I think we may conclude it was not in the Pacific.'

For the moment Mr. Flit was offended; he murmured something inarticulate to the effect that he was not a man to be treated with raillery, and that he had disembowelled the Khan of Khiva for a less impertinence; the fact was, that, thanks to the claret cup, he was inclined to be a little quarrelsome. After a few more applications to it, however, his nature, which was a very genial one, began to assert itself; and he overflowed with anecdote. The gentleman who surveyed mankind from

China to Peru was not to be compared, as regards opportunity, with Mr. Flit. He was, or had been, equally at home in the Arctic Circle or in the Torrid Zone. The Canon, very willing to make amends to his guest, begged him to relate what he considered to be his most interesting experience.

This was a proposition to which Mr. Flit was far too wise to accede. To tell his best story would be to open the door of competition much wider than suited his purpose. The very suggestion of it put him on his guard at once.

'*One* of the most amusing things I ever heard of,' he said, 'was told me by a friend of mine, a special, attached to a Cossack regiment in the Turco-Russian war. They entered a Bulgarian village one afternoon, when there was hardly light enough left for looting. In expectation of the arrival of their deliverers, the natives who had anything to lose had already hidden it. One man,

however, was seen by a Cossack to bury something in his garden with great precaution. As soon as it was dark, the Cossack dug it up with his spear, and brought it to the guard-room in triumph. It was a huge earthenware pot, carefully sealed up, which he confidently believed to be full of coin. To the disappointment of himself and his comrades, it proved to contain only yellow lard. Since their boots were in a terrible state from long travel, this, however, was not to be despised; and the whole regiment greased themselves with the compound to their great content. In the morning the commander of the Cossacks made them a little speech. He said (with his tongue in his cheek) that his Imperial Majesty the Czar had strictly forbidden looting, and was sorry to find that this regulation had been disregarded. The men protested—with truth, though without mentioning the cause of the omission—that they had not stolen a kopeck. "If you have

not taken money," returned the commander, "you have taken money's worth. The headman of the village complains that he has lost 1,200 roubles, which he had invested in a jar of attar of roses."

'The regiment, indeed, might have been smelt for six leagues away; but so very little sense of smell has the Russian soldier, that neither they nor their commander had noticed it.'

'It is quite true,' remarked Professor Pelski, gloomily, 'they have no scent except for the blood of a patriot. I could tell you such things—oh! such things—about my beloved country.'

He looked so very much as if he was about to do it, that the Canon felt some diversion was necessary to save the company from a condensed history of Poland.

'I should think you, Mr. Fluker,' he said, 'might give us a story or two out of the chronicles of the *haute finance* almost as

curious as even those of a special correspondent's note-book?'

'Story! God bless you, I have none to tell, sir,' exclaimed Mr. Fluker, quite ignorant that he was making use of a quotation. 'There was, however, a very funny thing came under my notice the other day. You know Bob Trip of course, our Bob Trip of the Stock Exchange—everybody's Bob Trip?'

The Canon nodded cheerily, as who shall say, 'Who does not know Bob Trip must himself be unknown.'

'Bob is a risky fellow, very; and some years ago got bitten in a tin-mine.'

'Bitten in a tin-mine?' murmured the Professor to himself; he was wondering what sort of animals had their dens in localities of that kind, but was unwilling to interrupt.

'"Charley," said Bob to me one day,

"what do you think I've done with those confounded mine shares?"

'"Not sold them!" said I, "I'll warrant."

'"No," said he; "come up and see." So he took me to his dressing-room and pointed to the walls of it, which he had papered from the top to bottom with the shares he held in the "Lostwithem Mining Company."

'"I have done this," he said, "to remind me every morning of my life what a fool I made of myself with that mine, and to be a caution to me against going into anything of a speculative nature as long as I live."

'Last week I heard that Bob had made himself director of a gold-mine in South America; which, after his promises of amendment in that way, surprised me very much. So, happening to pass by his house, I called.

'"Master is in his dressing-room," said the man.

'"What, at this time o' day?"

'"He passes most of his time there now, sir," said he, grinning.

'So I went up, and found Bob on his knees, with a penknife and a bucket of hot water.

'"What are you at?" said I.

'"Well, I am trying to get these coupons off the wall. Depend upon it, my good fellow, there's nothing like mines for investment, if you will only have a little patience. The 'Lostwithem' has declared a dividend."'

This story of the *haute finance* was received with rapture, and tickled Sophy, who had some sense of humour, as much as the rest.

Adair, however, as if jealous of the interest it had excited in her, murmured, grudgingly, 'It is extraordinary how any matter that has reference to money gains the public ear. I suppose, to most men, there is no subject so attractive.'

'I don't know about "most men,"' returned Sophy, gravely; 'but I can answer for my kind guardian yonder, that it is a subject that interests him least of all. I believe he neither knows nor cares anything about it.'

'But then, you see, he is very rich, and does not need to care,' returned Adair.

'Indeed, he is not rich; far from it.'

'Yet he is very liberal; that is, I mean,' stammered the young man, 'he has the reputation of being so.'

'Then report for once speaks true,' said Sophy, with animation. 'I did not know, however, that he was so spoken of, for he is a man that never talks of his own good deeds.'

Adair gave a secret sigh of relief; he had feared that the Canon might have told his ward something of his relations with himself, which, he thought, would cause her to despise him. A revolution had taken place within

him as regarded this young lady. He felt that he would much rather win her good opinion than own his influence over her to fear.

Immersed in thoughts which, though they had come upon him so unexpectedly, were not the less monopolising, he suddenly heard himself addressed by name.

The Canon had leant across towards his sister, and whispering to her, 'I remain here, of course, to entertain my guests: but if you and Sophy intend to be at the ball to-night, it is time you went to dress.'

'Let me have the pleasure of seeing you home, Miss Gilbert,' said Mr. Mavors, in a low tone.

But before Sophy could reply to his invitation, which had reached only her own ears, the Canon added: 'Mavors, I know you will be good enough to escort my sister. Mr. Adair, perhaps you will do the same kind office for your neighbour, Miss Gilbert.'

Adair jumped up, delighted. The Canon had not been displeased to see his ward and Adair 'get on' so well together, since the contrast, he thought, between his society and that of his *bête noire*, Mr. Herbert Perry, could not but strike her favourably, and, so far, have a good effect. He had, of course, no other motive than to pay the young scholar a compliment: but the proposal, chiming in as it did with the young man's dreams, seemed to the latter to have a deeper significance.

As Sophy laid her finger-tips upon his arm the blood rushed to his pale cheeks; his eyes glowed with pleasure. If she had the least curiosity on the subject (which she had not), she would have been surprised to note that he looked almost handsome. One would have said that, for the moment at all events, that little idyll of which Adair had hinted to the Canon—his love affair under Sir Charles's roof—had been forgotten, and that the object of it had retired, compulsorily, in Sophy's favour.

CHAPTER VI.

IMPORTUNATE.

I SUPPOSE there is nothing about which so much care is taken that, on the whole, is apt to go so wrong, as the disposal of heiresses in marriage. In their solicitude to shut the door against adventurers, parents and guardians open it to even less desirable swains—'hoary heads' with coronets, or dull clowns stuffed with bank-notes, which as often as not take to themselves wings. The matrimonial market is almost as limited for heiresses as that of Royalty; and, what is more, from self-respect quite as much as from fear of the Court of Chancery, the honest young man in particular avoids them as 'a thing forbid.'

Sophy Gilbert had the very great misfor-

tune of never having known a mother's care —she had lost her when she was but five years old; her father, a barrister in considerable practice, saw but little of her, but indulged her in every whim. She was left by necessity very much to the care of hirelings, and what in her case was not less unfortunate, to herself. She was accomplished and clever; her nature was affectionate and gentle, but it had never been strengthened by precept or example. Even as a child her love of admiration was prodigious: she was very precocious in her ideas. It was told of her that, having received a toy ring when of very tender years, she declined to have it put upon a certain finger because that made it 'an engaged ring.'

She read books of her own choice, and that choice was not judicious. When she was seventeen her father died, and left her to the care, as he expressed it, 'of the best of friends and the most honourable of men, William

Aldred.' So far as honour and kindness were concerned he could not, indeed, have hit upon a better guardian for her; but in other respects he could scarcely have selected a worse. How a man of business, like Mr. Gilbert, could have dreamt of selecting such a person for a trustee, was marvellous to those who are not acquainted with the testamentary eccentricities of men of business.

What was worse, however, than Canon Aldred's ignorance of affairs, was his ignorance of the ways of women and of the character of his ward. Except that she was a charmingly pretty and still more charmingly affectionate girl, he knew absolutely nothing about her. If ever a young lady wanted a tight rein and a curb, it was Miss Sophy Gilbert; and the Canon essayed to guide her with a loose rein and a snaffle. It was true that there was his sister Maria, whom his dead friend had doubtless looked to as a second mother for her. Nor was that lady

wanting in any office of affection and solicitude; but she had been brought up in a very different school from that in which young ladies of even that day—now some time ago—were educated. Notwithstanding her comparatively mature years, she had not learnt all that they knew. Suspicion of all kinds was foreign to her character: suspicion of those she loved was impossible to it. An upright woman, with a certain grace as well as dignity; not without some social pride of her own, but with a much keener sense of the respect and esteem in which 'my brother the Canon' was universally held; a courteous dispenser of hospitality; an excellent manager of a household within certain limits—she was, nevertheless, quite unequal to the duties, thus unexpectedly imposed upon her, of controlling and directing a young girl's mind. She was quite as indulgent to Sophy as her brother was; and, indeed, since the girl was her only companion, it was but natural

that she should do all she could to make life pleasant to her and keep her in good humour.

On the other hand, there were matters on which the Canon could be resolute enough. His sense of duty, as often happens with men of his stamp, was not so sensitive as his sense of honour, but when it was touched he was adamant.

He had a natural dislike to dissipation, and though very charitable in his own views, was amazed to see that a man like Herbert Perry should have attractions for his ward. For the reason he had given Mr. Mavors, he had not forbidden the young man his house; but it was absolutely certain that under no circumstances would the Canon give his consent to her union with such a person. There are men who tread the earth with such an airy step that one can hardly imagine them 'putting their foot down' in the sense of resolute opposition; but Sophy's guardian was one of this kind, and she knew it.

'Thanks to the enthusiasm of our boating friends,' said Miss Maria to Mr. Mavors as the two ladies left the Canon's rooms with their separate escorts, 'I have a slight headache, and I think a walk will do me good. As it is such a beautiful night, what do you say to going home by the Backs?'

This entailed a considerable circuit, the prospect of which, in Miss Maria's company, was certainly less alluring to the Tutor than it would have been had Miss Sophy been committed to his charge; but he signified at once a polite assent.

Their road lay through the lime-walk, almost deserted now, for the great throng of undergraduates had gone away with the boats or to array themselves for the 'Procession Ball.' The more mature couple led the way; the young people followed at a distance, which Adair endeavoured, by slow walking, to make as considerable as he could.

The spring was everywhere, even in his

views of his own chances. It was, perhaps, the first time in his life that he had felt it so; as a dependent, his emotions had been kept under control, nor was it his nature to encourage them. His system was also not so familiar with claret cup as that of his late companions, and what he had drunk, perhaps, tended to his exhilaration. This dissatisfied-minded young recluse seemed to himself, in short (notwithstanding his mathematical training, which should have shown it to be impossible), to be walking on air.

He was in Paradise: and Sophy, who guessed the fact, did not choose to let him know that it was a fool's Paradise.

As they passed through the gates opposite 'the Roundabout'—a solitary wilderness used by the Trinity fellows only—Adair felt her arm tremble within his own.

'You need never fear, dear Miss Gilbert,' he whispered, significantly, with a glance at the spot in question, 'that I will

ever reveal what I accidentally witnessed yonder.'

There were two replies open to Sophy. She might have said, and with truth, 'You saw nothing of which I have any reason to be ashamed, no matter what ideas you may entertain to the contrary, or however well founded they may appear to you.' But this course would have necessitated an explanation it was impossible to give, and which if she had given would (she felt) have once more made an enemy of her companion. The other course was to have accepted with thanks his promise of silence, and this again she dared not take. To admit a confidence of this kind between them was only less dangerous than the other alternative; it would be an encouragement to him of which she feared he would take advantage. She had already come to the conclusion not only that Mr. John Adair was not a gentleman to be trusted in any delicate matter, but that he was not a

gentleman at all. His calling her 'dear Miss Gilbert' upon so short an acquaintance struck her (as indeed it was) as an audacious impertinence; yet she was so much in his power that she dared not show the least trace of indignation. An unpleasant position for even a man to be in, but for a young lady a deplorable one indeed.

She answered nothing.

'I suppose you are going to the ball to-night?' he continued.

The question was a very simple one, but she connected it at once (as he had intended her to do) with the incident to which he had already alluded. The blood rushed to her very temples, but the tone of her reply was studiously indifferent.

'Did you not hear my guardian say so?'

'No; I heard nothing of what he or any one else was saying; I was only thinking of you.'

'It is a pity that you had not some-

thing better to think about,' said Sophy, pettishly.

She regretted it the next moment, not because it was such a reply as a maid-servant might have given to her military cousin, but from the opportunity which she felt it would afford him of paying a compliment.

'It would be difficult,' he said, with a smile, 'to think of anybody better than yourself, Miss Gilbert.'

Both the smile and the words made her blood run cold; the one because there were reasons why, to have aroused the affections of this man was more dangerous even than to have become his enemy; the other, because, though uttered without any meaning in particular, they seemed to her to convey the bitterest sarcasm. Just at that moment it was difficult for her to imagine any one worse than herself. Not that she was really bad in a moral sense. I will never admit that of Sophy; but she had been guilty of such

weakness that (now that her punishment was beginning) it seemed wickedness. We are all inclined to blame ourselves for our follies, not in proportion to their gravity, but to the amount of inconvenience they entail upon us : from this point of view it was no wonder that poor Sophy appeared to herself a criminal.

Why, oh why ! did Aunt Maria and Mr. Mavors move so slowly, and loiter on the bridge ? What on earth was there to admire in Queen's College ! Would that hateful walk with this unpleasant and importunate young man *never* come to an end ?

Sophy was generally mistress of herself and of her wits, but the peril in which she stood had paralysed her ready tongue ; her presence of mind was gone ; she had no nerve for those light replies which men thought so agreeable, and women so frivolous. To answer her companion seriously, and as she felt was fitting—that is, with grave reproof—was beyond her courage. His threats she knew

would be more dangerous now—if she moved him to threaten—than they had been at first. Yet to be silent was to encourage him.

She felt like one who, in a dark night, has wandered to the edge of a precipice and dares not go back or forwards, or scarce stir a finger, but must wait motionless for the dawn. Oh to be safe at home in her own little chamber, praying Heaven to forgive her for her folly and disobedience; and (especially) to shield her from the consequences of them!

'You are very silent just now,' observed the young man, after a long pause, 'but I dare say you will have a good deal to say an hour or so hence, with some favoured partner.'

His tone, she marked, was already changed; her reticence had angered him.

'When I go to a ball,' she said, with an effort at sprightliness, 'I assure you it is not to talk; I like dancing for dancing's sake, and give myself up to it like a child.'

'I should hardly have thought you such an "*ingénue*,"' was the dry response; 'but, then, I have never seen you *at* a ball.'

There was something in the adverb, or rather in the stress he laid upon it, that, like a bullet, seemed to strike her very heart and still its beatings. Suddenly withdrawing her fingers from his arm, she exclaimed, 'That is the third time, Mr. Adair, you have thought proper to hint at an incident which, though if you knew all you would know that I had no cause to be ashamed of, you must certainly perceive to be disagreeable and even painful to me. If you were more accustomed to the usages of good society you would see that such conduct is unbecoming a gentleman; if you ever venture to allude to that subject again you will only have yourself to thank for anything disagreeable that may happen to you.'

'Am I to consider that your words imply a threat, Miss Gilbert?'

He had stopped also; it was upon the bridge, however, where the other couple had delayed, so that even had they looked back the circumstance would have attracted no surprise. His pale face was white with suppressed passion; his keen eyes blazed with it. The sight of them convinced her that what had tended to impress the incident referred to upon this man's mind was the humiliation he had suffered upon that occasion. In her passionate indignation she had, in truth, intended to suggest that that humiliation might be repeated; nay, that even chastisement might follow in case he continued his persecution; but she now perceived that she had gone too far. He was a coward in one sense, for who but a coward would have so behaved to her? But he was not a man to be frightened.

'Yes,' she answered, in firm but gentler tones, 'I did imply a threat. If you ever speak to me upon that subject again, they

will be the last words that will ever pass between us. It is possible that such a menace will have no force with you, but it will certainly be put into effect.'

For the moment it was evident he had his suspicions; but the pained and resolute expression which she threw into her pretty face disarmed them.

'The threat of such a punishment is a deterrent indeed,' he said, gravely. 'I have already promised you to keep silence upon the matter in question to others, and that promise will henceforth include yourself; and now I trust we are friends again.'

Sophy felt very far from friendly, but she moved her head in token of assent, and took once more his proffered arm.

They had reached Trumpington Street, and were nearing her home before she spoke again.

'As we have made up our quarrels, Miss Gilbert, may I hope that you will give me a

dance or two at the ball this evening? I do not ask for the first waltz,' he added, hastily, perceiving the look of amazement and even alarm that came into her face; 'it is only too probable that the first one may be bespoken by another. I know too well how eagerly you are sought after as a partner; you are not annoyed at the request, I hope. *One* dance really does not seem much to ask.'

'I am not annoyed,' said Sophy, mustering a smile, 'but I am certainly astonished at such a request from such a quarter. My guardian said you were the very last man, Mr. Adair, likely to be seen at a ball.'

'I know; I heard him,' returned the young man, quietly. 'Still I mean to go to this ball.'

It was on Sophy's rash lips to say, 'I do not dance round dances.' But the consequences of her rash and reckless conduct in another and more serious matter were fortunately too present with her to admit of that.

'If my aunt's headache, to which she is a martyr,' said Sophy, with a drop in her voice, 'permits of her chaperoning me to the ball at all, I shall be very happy to dance with you, Mr. Adair.'

'How differently the same phrase may be used by different lips!' said the young man, thoughtfully. 'When *you* say you shall be "very happy" to dance with me, you only mean "you don't care if you do;" but when *I* say "I shall be very happy to dance with you"—and, indeed, your promise has already made me so—that is the simple truth.'

They were now at the gate of 'The Laurels.'

'I cannot invite you gentlemen to come in,' said Aunt Maria, as she shook hands with Mr. Mavors, 'because we have to dress for the ball.'

'I wish I was a ball-going man,' said the Tutor, gallantly. The observation was made to Miss Maria, but it was uttered as he shook hands with Miss Sophy.

'Good-bye, or rather *au revoir*,' said the young scholar, under his breath.

Miss Sophy Gilbert was not unconscious (though the fact occupied but little of her attention) that she had twenty thousand pounds of her own; but she would have given the half of it, as she graciously echoed his '*au revoir*,' could she have been assured that she should neither see nor hear of Mr. Adair again.

CHAPTER VII.

AUNT MARIA'S HEADACHE.

It is generally understood that, among the higher classes at least, man is the Worker and woman the Player. Except in the rare cases of his helpmate being an author or an artist, he is doubtless the breadwinner and general provider; but woman also has her work to do, often quite as hard work as is done 'in the City,' or in 'the dusky purlieus of the law,' and much more continuous. The Lawyer, when he mounts his cob, may leave black care behind him; the Merchant, when he sits down to his afternoon rubber, may forget his anxieties; but their spouses have no such relaxations, and have the objects of

their solicitude always under their eye. Some of them are so ill-advised as to make their husbands sharers of their own proper burden, and, when he comes home to his well-earned meal, to vex him with stories of this or that gone amiss which it is not in his power to remedy. But, as a general rule, women keep their domestic troubles to themselves, and because they do not speak of them men are apt to underrate their importance. Yet, what is the management of a staff of clerks, with even a forger or two among them, compared with the control of a band of wild boys or giddy girls, such as are often as the 'apple of our eye' to us? What is the presentiment of evil in business affairs, compared with the possibilities of wrong-doing in Jack or Jane, of which the mother's prescient heart has given her only too sure a warning? To wait, to watch, to speak, and to act (but only at the proper time); to be vigilant against those who, though no adversaries, have the

of having done anything seriously amiss she would certainly look frightened.'

There was not a flaw in this logic, only the logician did not understand how very much more frightened Sophy had been during the last half hour than she was now. When one has had a loaded pistol close to one's ear for a little, the production of one that is not loaded can be borne with comparative equanimity.

'What has happened to-night, Sophy, has distressed me, and I am sure my dear brother also, exceedingly.'

Sophy's musical eyes expressed a mild surprise.

'Is it possible that you can be unaware of what happened on the river? That that very forward young man, Mr. Perry, had the bad taste to drink your health in public, under our very windows?'

'And was that such very bad taste, Aunt Maria?' inquired the young girl, demurely.

'Pray, pray, Sophy, do not treat this matter with lightness. It was most infamous taste. It would have been bad taste, even if he had been engaged to you, which, as you well know, can never, never happen.'

Sophy smiled; it was a very different smile from her former one; it had confidence in it, but also sadness.

'Well, at all events for a very long time to come,' continued Aunt Maria, 'there is no possibility of your marrying him; should you ever do so it will be in direct antagonism both to myself and your guardian, and I don't think we have deserved of you to have —I do not say our wishes only, but our most serious convictions—set at nought.'

'You have deserved nothing of me but love and gratitude,' said Sophy, with the tears in her eyes. 'Whatever happens, I shall never forget how much I owe you.'

'And yet you propose to repay us with disobedience?' observed Aunt Maria, drily

Then, as if unable to maintain so stern a tone, even for a moment, she answered gently, 'It is not for our sakes, Sophy, as you well know; but for your own, that we are so strenuous upon this point. When you come of age you will be independent of us, and can do as you like; there are many persons who under the same circumstances would be glad enough to get rid of such a responsibility as you must needs be to us. But when you leave us, you will still be in our hearts; your future will affect us as much as your present does at this hour, only we shall no longer have the power to shape it. Even now, if your guardian knew as much as I do —how often Mr. Perry comes here, how often you make excuses for meeting him elsewhere —it would make him miserable. And yet it is not for his sake, but for your own, that I entreat you to give up this man.'

Sophy, huddled upon the sofa, with her little hands hiding her pretty face, answered only by her sobs.

'It is better for you to cry now, my dear,' continued Aunt Maria, with a tender tremor nevertheless in her own voice, 'than when things are past crying for. I heard to-night some talk of Mr. Perry, which those who uttered it little thought had any personal interest for me. He is a man of bad temper, as well as of bad habits; not a favourite even with those who know him best, and among whom he has gained some pre-eminence; he is a "good oar," it seems, and that is all; a poor recommendation for a partner in life. I own he is very handsome, but you will not think him so when he frowns at you. Such men soon get tired of their pretty playthings. Indeed, I have noticed that of late weeks his manner to yourself is not what it used to be; he takes less trouble to please you, perhaps because he feels sure of you. I earnestly trust that he has as yet no ground for such confidence.'

Sophy moaned.

'You are not engaged to him?' put in the other quickly.

'No, Aunt Maria, no,' murmured the girl.

'Then part from him, I beseech you, while there is yet time. People have already begun to talk of you. If you don't believe me, ask Henny Helford; she will tell you the truth, and give you good advice besides. It is most painful to me to speak like this; but, Sophy, it is better so than that my brother should speak to you. I doubt whether I am right in concealing your conduct from him; but I know that it would vex him so. He is the kindest of men, but his noble heart revolts at anything like duplicity or underhand doings.'

'Don't tell him—oh! don't tell him,' pleaded Sophy, earnestly.

'Well, then, for this once, and trusting to see signs of amendment in your behaviour, I won't,' replied Aunt Maria.

She said this with quite a magnanimous air; but the fact was, she had nothing very definite to tell, only certain small misdoings on Sophy's part, which, feeling herself to blame for having permitted, she was not very anxious to reveal.

'I don't wish to speak of my own troubles in the matter,' she continued, after a pause; 'but I can't say what I suffered this evening when I saw Mr. Perry with that great flagon in his hand leering at us, like somebody wicked in the heathen mythology. He had had too much to drink already; and that's the truth, Sophy. And then to think that he will be at the ball to-night, most probably intoxicated. Now, Sophy, do promise me that you will not dance with that man.'

'I will promise you that, Aunt Maria,' was the unexpected reply; 'for I shall not go to the ball at all.'

'But, my dear, that will look extremely odd: indeed it may be said that you were

afraid to meet Mr. Perry, which will be worse than anything.'

'I am not at all afraid of meeting Mr. Perry,' said Sophy, quietly, 'but I had rather not go.'

'But so many people will be expecting us, my dear! What excuse can you possibly make?'

'None at all,' said Sophy, mustering up a little smile. 'It is you who must be the excuse, Aunt Maria. You said you had a headache, you know, when you left my guardian's rooms.'

'But it's gone now,' exclaimed Aunt Maria, simply.

'I can bring it back in half a minute,' cried Sophy; and, springing from the sofa, she sat down at the piano and thundered the March from 'Athalie,' which made Aunt Maria, who detested loud music of any kind, put her hands to her ears, and very literally sue for peace.

'You have really given me a headache now,' she cried, 'you naughty girl!'

'That is because you are so dreadfully conscientious, dear Aunt Maria; it is the reward of truth. Nor is it a mere selfish advantage; for now I, who have no headache, can honestly say that you have got one.' Then, dropping her light tone, she flew to the other's side, and murmured caressingly, 'I am so sorry, darling Auntie; but it will soon go off, and we will both stay at home together, and have a cosy evening, won't we?'

At that moment there was a ring at the door bell.

Sophy turned pale; it is not only the wicked who 'flee when no man pursueth,' but also the wilful and the weak.

No man was pursuing her, as it turned out; but the girl thought one might be. It was an intense relief when the servant announced Miss Helford.

Henrietta, called for love and euphony, Henny, Helford was Sophy's dearest friend, and a near neighbour. She had come in by appointment, though, in Sophy's distress and perturbation of mind, the latter had clean forgotten it. The arrival of this visitor, pure, sincere, and thoroughly to be relied upon, seemed to her like an intervention of Providence. As more than one of her fellow-creatures had had cause to remark, the very look of Henny Helford in time of trouble was a consolation; but at all times it was very pleasing. She was fair like her friend, but there the resemblance ended; she was not pretty in the ordinary sense of the word; her features were not regular enough to conform to any standard of good looks; she was only winning.

Without the vivacity of Sophy, she had the loveliness which is the result of sympathy with the hopes of others; although not gifted with the large and somewhat vague aspira-

tions which actuate some of her sex in these days, everything had interest for her that concerned those she knew. Without being florid, she had a fresh complexion, that spoke of health and early hours; and, without being masculine, she was tall and of a noble figure. In a metaphor culled from his books, the Canon used to describe his ward as a duodecimo and her friend as a crown octavo. He even warned the latter that he looked to see her in another edition—a quarto. It was possible, indeed, that—in the fulness of time—Henny's charms would become matronly; but at present she was not a whit too plump. Her binding (to pursue the image) was by no means so brilliant as that of her duodecimo ally. Always sedate in her attire, she was just now still in mourning for her elder brother, who had died some months ago, leaving an orphan child, her constant care, behind him.

'You will be glad to hear "Stevie" is

better,' she said, after she had kissed her friends.

'The doctor thinks he will get over it, does he?' said Miss Aldred, slily. She knew the child had only a malady incident to childhood—the chickenpox.

'With care,' returned the unconscious Henny; 'he gives us hopes that the child will be himself again by the end of the week. I should have come before, Sophy, only I waited till the little darling was asleep. But you are late yourself. I expected to see you attired for conquest.'

Here Aunt Maria slipped out of the room. She was a consenting party to the little fraud Sophy and she had planned together, but she did not wish to sanction it by her presence while it was being explained to a third party.

'I am afraid you will be disappointed, Henny,' said Sophy, with an indifferent smile, or rather with an indifferent attempt at

a smile; 'but the fact is, we are not going to the ball.'

'Not going to the ball! Not going to the Procession Ball?' repeated Henny, in a tone of the most utter incredulity. 'Why, how comes that?'

To have answered the question as Henny would have answered it—that is, with exactest truth—would have been difficult indeed. Yet, as generally happens, it would have been better for the person addressed to have spoken the truth and the whole truth. She could not, she well knew, have had a better adviser; nor, from one point of view, a better confidante.

But as our very weaknesses are often a recommendation to the confidence of our fellow-creatures, so a too severely moral nature as often repels it. Sophy gazed in her companion's questioning face with pitiful yearning: girl as she was, she would have given years of her young life to have thrown

herself into the other's arms and have sobbed out the whole history of her troubles. But she felt she could no more have shared with her the secret of that wish than she could have proposed to her to smother 'Stevie.'

'Aunt Maria has a headache,' said Sophy, in a tone that had far too much of sorrow for so slight a misfortune.

'What a pity! I am sure it must be bad indeed for your aunt to inflict such a disappointment on you.'

'It is no disappointment,' said Sophy, passionately, her feelings for the moment overcoming all considerations of prudence. 'I am glad I am not going.' The outburst did her good, but even while she gave reins to it, she saw its danger.

'The truth is, Henny'—a phrase which too often precedes the explosion of an especially large 'cracker'—'though *you* may consider them still a treat, for my part, I am getting rather tired of balls.'

'Tired of balls! *You* tired of balls!' ejaculated Henny, aghast. It was as though a moderate Mussulman had just heard one of the truest of believers abjure the faith. 'Why, what will you be tired of next? Not me, I hope!'

'No, Henny, not you,' returned Sophy, bitterly. 'I have not so many friends that I can afford to lose one, and the best of them.'

'Why, Sophy, what's the matter?'

Henny fell on her knees, and put her arm about the other's waist; her face she could not see, for Sophy had hidden it in her hands, but she knew what was going on behind them. 'Don't cry, don't cry, my darling. I promised mamma I would only be gone for a few moments, thinking you were going to the ball; but if I can be of any good, if you want to talk with me, Sophy, I'll just run back and tell her not to sit up for me.'

'No, Henny, no,' sobbed the other; 'I'd rather be alone to-night. I'm a little over-

done, that's all; and sleep will do me more good than anything.'

There are few things to be compared with that admirable invention, sleep; but on this occasion it would have been better for Sophy if she had tried another remedy—the counsel of a true friend.

Henny did not believe that mere fatigue was at the bottom of Sophy's indisposition, but she thought that solitude and reflection were what she needed. Perhaps she had had a tiff with her lover. Henny had a lover herself, though she had never had a tiff with him, and understood that such a catastrophe would be a subject not to be talked about even with the most intimate of friends, but to be repented of by oneself. She rose to her feet at once, and, imprinting a silent kiss on Sophy's forehead, moved softly and sorrowfully out of the room.

CHAPTER VIII.

IN PURSUIT.

If Miss Sophy Gilbert had begun to hate balls, there were a good many young people in Cambridge that night who were of a different opinion; they had only just begun to love them. The town-hall, in which the Entertainment of the evening was held, was crammed with guests. About ten o'clock it had come on to rain heavily; but that circumstance had no effect upon the attendance of the ladies. It was one of the few entertainments of the like kind where every girl, no matter how plain, was sure of plenty of partners, and of young partners. The male sex was

considerably in excess of the female, and they were almost without exception dancing men.

There was, however, one young man who scarcely came under that category; and who, though he meant to dance that night, for the present seemed content to stand by the ball-room door, and to scan with unobtrusive glance whosoever entered it. His anxiety was not easily to be accounted for, since he appeared to know nobody. At last, however, appeared one who seemed no stranger to him, though Adair made no sign of recognition; on the contrary, he drew himself up in the corner he had selected, and watched him furtively but with great attention.

The new comer was a magnificently handsome young man, very tall and broad-shouldered, with curly light-brown hair; and but for a soft brown beard, and a look in his eyes that suggested imperiousness of disposition, might have sat—or stood—for Antinous. Except for his frame, however, there

was little of Greek about him, and certainly none in his head. His complexion was not only fresh but flushed; and as he carelessly nodded to his male acquaintances, who were numerous enough, they now and then nudged one another and shrugged their shoulders. None of them ventured, however, to tell him what was in their thoughts; for Herbert Perry was not a man to whom even the most intimate friend could with prudence have hinted that after a boating supper it is injudicious for some people to come to a ball. His glance roved with bold inquiry from one young lady to another; and as they revolved in the mazy dance before him, his disappointed expectations seemed to give way to anger. He stood at the opposite corner of the room to that in which Adair (his watcher) had taken his stand, stroking his beard and frowning heavily. Adair, though he was disappointed too, seemed to derive great pleasure from his discomfiture.

'She is not coming, my young friend,' he scornfully murmured to himself; 'and, even if she does come, it is a wet night, and there will be no wandering with her in the Round-about.'

Once only their eyes met. On Perry's part recognition was not immediate; his perceptions, never very quick, were dulled with his recent potations; but under the other's continued gaze, memory awoke within him. His face blazed with wrath, and he stepped forward as if about to cross the room; then, as Adair withdrew his glance, with a pretence of indifference, and fixed it upon some other object, his anger seemed to give place to contempt. He muttered to himself, 'The man is a cur; it will be time to throttle him if he ventures to give tongue.'

If he thought that Adair was a coward, Mr. Perry's judgment was even less acute than usual. The former had actually had it in his

mind by that long-continued stare at his rival to goad him on to quarrel. If he could have induced Perry to disgrace himself in public, he would have cheerfully run the personal risk to which it would have undoubtedly exposed him. As the night wore on, the other grew more impatient; once or twice he passed into the refreshment-room, from which he emerged with heightened colour, only again to scan in vain the countenances of the dancers for her he sought. At last, with a smothered oath, he left his place, and, shouldering his way without much courtesy through the throng, reached the outer hall. A wind had arisen and was driving the rain in sheets through the deserted town.

'Will you have a fly, Mr. Perry?' inquired one of the ticket porters who knew him.

'Curse your flies!' was the curt rejoinder, as in his thin patent boots and evening dress

he stepped into the streets, with nothing but his cap and gown to shield him from the storm.

'That's a queer devil,' observed the custodian of the hats and coats to the ticket porter.

'Aye! but a good plucked one,' observed the other, admiringly.

The eulogium was correct in more than one sense, for Mr. Herbert Perry had been far from successful in his University examinations; but it was curious, considering the rudeness with which the man had been treated, he should have been eulogistic at all. The fact is, however, that if a certain class of society (and not a small one) chose their own kings, it would be for the same reason that they were chosen in the earliest ages—namely, for their thews and sinews. They admire a man as we admire an ironclad, in proportion to his powers of self-defence, and quite independent of whether the thing to be defended—such as

his life—is valuable or otherwise. Though Mr. Herbert Perry had a rough tongue, and was not very free with his shillings, it is probable that if the Cambridge townfolk had had to choose a representative from the undergraduates he would have stood at the top of the poll.

Scarcely had he left the hall, and ere the attendant had closed the door against the driving rain, a second young gentleman from the ball-room demanded his cap and gown, and, snatching them from the attendant's hand, followed on the other's heels.

'There's another in a hurry!' ejaculated the custodian. 'Blest if *he* too ain't gone and left his great-coat behind him.'

'Why, yes,' replied the porter, peering out into the storm, 'and to see the way in which he is cutting after Mr. Perry yonder, one would think he was his lady-love. They don't look much of a muchness neither, do they? I should say that second one never

feathered an oar or doubled his fist in his life.'

'A mugger, that's what he is,' said the other, contemptuously; 'a mugger'—a comprehensive term understood to include all persons with an ambition for University distinction.

Though Adair had pursued his rival (for such it was clear, whether with good reason or not, he considered him to be) with such precipitancy, it was only to make sure that he did not escape him at the outset. Directly he caught sight of him striding rapidly in the direction, as he had anticipated, of Trumpington Street, he slackened his pace, contenting himself with keeping him in view. He was wet through, but, though that was a somewhat novel experience for one of his indoor habits, it affected him not the least. The wind blew 'shrill, chill' in his face, and cut through his thin garments to the bone; but of that, too, he was unconscious. The one

thought in his mind was, 'Will she come to meet him, and where?' That any assignation could have been made between these two seemed indeed most unlikely, or Perry would not have been so disappointed (as he undoubtedly had been) at not seeing Miss Gilbert at the ball; but it was possible—for anything seemed possible to the young scholar's jealous soul—that they had some means of meeting whenever they pleased. If so, he was resolved to find it out. That, he had persuaded himself, was his sole motive; but if he could have examined his heart he could perhaps have found another.

Mr. John Adair, as we know, had already had a 'love affair'—which indeed was a very fitting name for it—for it had not been all emotion and disinterestedness. If the Canon had known more about it, he would not have alluded to it—or abstained from alluding to it—with such an excess of delicacy. When he had said to the young scholar, 'We cannot

get all we want in this world,' he had taken it for granted that Adair had lost his patron's favour by fixing his boyish affections upon some young lady too highly placed; and his guess had been a shrewd one. The lady in question had been, indeed, the sister of Sir Charles Adair. Where the Canon's mistake lay was in supposing that the scholar had been ill-treated. The ill-behaviour, notwithstanding that Adair had protested that he had 'done nothing to be ashamed of,' was all the other way. Miss Adair was his senior by ten years, and, the truth was, had had no other attraction for him than the possession of an independent fortune. His motives had been suspected, or rather detected, and his connection with his patron abruptly broken off in consequence. Such was the romance, or the first volume of it, of Mr. John Adair.

It is fair to say, however, that, as regards Sophy Gilbert, matters were very different

with him. She was the first woman for whom he had entertained a genuine passion; and he had lost his heart and almost his head to her. The recklessness of his present conduct—so different from his usual caution and forethought—was proof of it. His only chance in life, as he well knew, lay in University distinction, and he was imperilling it upon her account. To be mixed up with any scandal in connection with the ward of Canon Aldred would probably be his ruin. With whatever imprudence the young lady had behaved, it was not his business to discover it, and any attempt to do so would naturally be bitterly resented by all parties. He had undertaken the post of detective of his own free will, nor could he pretend that he had done so upon other than personal grounds. He was no minister of public justice. If he looked at the matter from a moral point of view at all, it was of a specific kind; he had, perhaps, a vague idea that he was doing his

best to prevent this girl from marrying a man utterly unworthy of her, and with whom she could not be happy; he had also ventured to picture her—but this was purely an imaginary case—united to a more eligible swain, averse to claret-cup and attached to the study of the higher mathematics. But all these thoughts were forgotten in his present purpose—to track his rival's footsteps and discover where they led.

As to what should be the bearing of a young gentleman bound upon a clandestine interview with his beloved object there may be different opinions; but Mr. Herbert Perry's manner was certainly unlike anything one would have expected under such circumstances. At first he indulged in very bad language, snatches of which were borne upon the wind to the ears of his pursuer; whereas it is surely usual to husband one's oaths for the presence of the young lady, and even then to use only those of fealty and

devotion. Instead of cautiously keeping under the shadow of the houses, he took the middle of the pavement, and that with the swagger of a dragoon in spurs. So far from looking like an evildoer, his air gave the impression of one who suffers under a vehement sense of wrong, and who is resolved to take the remedy into his own hands. Even when the wind and rain had cooled him a little, and these symptoms of indignation disappeared, there was nothing in his behaviour to suggest passion or secrecy. Once indeed he suddenly vanished from the eyes of his pursuer, who himself kept far aloof, and as much out of sight as possible, in case the other should look behind him; but in a moment or two he emerged from his concealment more conspicuous even than before; he had only taken advantage of a doorway to light up a huge cigar. It was long past the hour for gate-shutting; but on that night no proctors were to be found, since an extension of hours had

been granted to all who intended to be at the Procession Ball; those officials themselves indeed were well content to keep within doors in such weather, and, except a policeman or two, not a soul was stirring in the flickering and wind-swept street.

By the time they were clear of the houses it had ceased raining, but the wind had risen still higher. It was weather indeed such as has been described by the most realistic of poets :—

> It was a wild night out of doors,
> The wind was mad upon the moors,
> And came into the rocking town,
> Stabbing all things up and down.

And scarcely was it less mad among the new-fledged woods and shrubberies which now fringed the road. It seemed as though the Prince of the Powers of the Air—magnificent but gruesome title!—was making triumphal progress. The shrieks and yells of the unseen element were very uncanny, and might have aroused, one would have thought, the most stagnant imagination. Mr. Herbert

Perry, however, had none. Elemental nature had no voice for him. Neither sky nor star had ever hallowed his thoughts; and if he loved the earth, it was for its grosser pleasures. His music was not that of the spheres; he liked the 'tongs and the bones,' and they sufficed him. Yet, physically, what a splendid fellow he was! Possessed of such manly beauty as might have been termed glorious, if beauty can be glorious without a soul.

Suddenly the moon came out and shone upon his face. The traces of anger and of wine had vanished from it, and a certain necessity for caution, which he had now begun to experience, gave it an expression of thoughtfulness. As his pursuer shrank into the hedge to avoid the effulgence, his own keen face, full of intelligence but also of stealth and hate, looked very poor beside it. It was the case of Hyperion to a satyr; and Adair felt the contrast. It was no wonder,

he confessed to himself, between his teeth, that the fancy of a foolish girl, ignorant of the higher mathematics, should have been taken by such a man.

And there was no doubt that it had been so. As he had all along suspected, his rival was going to the 'Laurels,' where she would probably give him a secret interview; it should not, however, if he could help it, be an unseen one. Perry had stopped, and for the first time looked suspiciously behind him. Then he left the road and passed through the gate that opened upon the gravel sweep before the house. The moon was now obscured again, and Adair, emerging from the hedge, followed close upon his footsteps. In his haste and excitement the gate which the other had opened and closed behind him with caution was torn from his less powerful fingers by the wind, and clanged behind him.

He had but just time to throw himself upon the ground among the shrubs, when

Perry, attracted by the noise, ran back to the spot. Had he found him, there would probably have been murder done; though not necessarily by the stronger man. Prone as he was, on the wet earth, Adair contrived to take out a well-sharpened knife, with which he had deftly mended many a pen in examinations, and open it. He was not a man to submit to chastisement, however well deserved. The other, however, after a brief examination, appeared to ascribe the matter to accident. He had not, it seemed, shut the gate, as he had intended to do; and, cursing his own carelessness in not having done so, he passed on.

CHAPTER IX.

THE WAITING-MAID.

THE Canon, as Perry was perhaps aware, was sleeping in chambers that night; he was a wise man, who loved his rest, and did not wish to run the risk of having it destroyed during the small hours by the ladies' return from the ball. His friends were probably still around him, discoursing of every subject under heaven, or even higher, for thought was free in those symposiums; or perhaps they had left him, and over his last pipe he was musing alone upon his beloved Milton or his absent son. What, in any case, he was certainly *not* dreaming of, was that two undergraduates were in his garden, and had

been but two minutes ago within an inch or so—for it had been little more—of killing one another for the love of his ward. It is that inch or so, however, which saves us every day from all sorts of catastrophes, of which we never guess, nor are ever told.

Perry glanced up at the windows; those of the sitting-rooms were dark, but a light still glimmered in the top story. He moved rapidly to the back of the house, and took a similar observation of it: all that side was dark. Perry uttered his usual exclamation of disappointment, a noun of three syllables, generally understood to be the copyright of divines. He was evidently puzzled what to do. After a moment's reflection, however, he mounted some iron steps that led from the garden to the drawing-room balcony, and also to a door which gave egress to some smaller chamber, probably a lady's boudoir; and, taking a half-crown from his pocket, struck with it the brass around the keyhole

twice. Amid the roaring of the wind, the blow was unheard without, but inside the house the noise was probably distinct enough, especially to ears that were accustomed to such a signal. There was a considerable delay, during which Perry stood with one ear at the keyhole, and his foot on the step, prepared for instant flight, should the expected footstep sound unfamiliar to him. Adair crouched down beneath him, shadowed by a laurel-bush, and watched his every motion, as a cat of tender years watches a rat of dangerous dimensions.

For a wonder, Perry showed no trace of impatience (which convinced the other that he had been used to wait under similar circumstances), and remained in that statuesque but somewhat strained position till his signal was answered. A bolt was quietly withdrawn, the door softly opened, and after a word or two—as it seemed by the tone—of objection on the part of the person within,

the young man was admitted. The incident itself was as strange as a story out of the 'Arabian Nights'; but to Adair, to whom romance was unknown, even by hearsay, it was simply amazing. He had disbeliefs enough of his own to answer for, evil imaginings, and thoughts devoid of charity; but he was not one of those gilded youths littered in scarlet, who are not ashamed to be sceptical of the virtue of that sex to which their mothers belong; his origin had been too low to admit of his being suckled in such a creed. He had already had ample evidence that Sophy Gilbert was fond, foolish, and weak almost to recklessness of reputation with respect to this unworthy suitor of hers, but that had by no means prepared him for the spectacle to which he had just been a witness. Had he been a man of higher moral character he would have been shocked; but his amazement partook rather of that kind of surprise with which one hears of

some legal acquaintance, never very particular in his professional proceedings, having been struck off the rolls: we knew he was rather shady, but had never thought *that* of him. This reflection, however, lasted only for a minute, and was succeeded by a very different feeling—jealousy. It was as though a great wave of evil passions had swept over his soul, and drenched it with envy, hatred, and malice. He gazed upon the house which held the pair he hated, as Satan in another garden is described, by our Canon's favourite poet, 'with hellish rancour imminent,' to have sought the bower of a more guiltless couple. His suspicions were not, perhaps, unwarrantable; but he had certainly no ground for anger; to him, at all events, Sophy Gilbert owed neither love nor loyalty; and yet, if a wish of his at that moment could have killed her, she would have been a dead woman.

Marvellous indeed are the ways of Fate

with man. How often she sports with his fiercest passions, and arouses them, as it seems, in mere wantonness and derision! If the poor rage-rocked wretch could have looked into that boudoir-chamber, from the door of which he never removed his eyes even for an instant, he would have perceived that all these vehement emotions of his were a waste of mental tissue. His suspicions had been unjust and his deductions untrue. When that door had opened to Mr. Perry's signal, it was at the touch of a female hand indeed, but it was not Sophy's.

This woman was much taller, had a somewhat coarse complexion, and wore a cap on her head of that description which is termed 'fly-a-way,' much affected by ladies'-maids. She was good-looking, and even good-natured-looking, but her eyes were rather too small for her face, and had a cunning look, which, in one in her position, suggested intrigue. On the present occasion, however, the expression of her

face on catching sight of her midnight visitor, was one of mingled alarm and anger. She made, indeed (though this was doubtless but a feint), as though she would have closed the half-opened door in his face, had he not thrust in his strong fingers and prevented it.

'You must be mad, Mr. Perry, to come here at such an hour as this!' she exclaimed, indignantly.

'Why did not your mistress come to the ball?' he inquired, sternly, and without taking the least notice of her indignation.

'And what is that to you, sir? I mean,' she added, alarmed by the heavy frown that gathered on his brow, 'what was there in her not going that can excuse your coming here? You have no right——'

'I have a right,' he interrupted, with distinctness. 'Let me in.' And ignoring the resistance of her well-knit and far from delicate arm, as though it were a cobweb, he pushed his way in, and closed the door behind him.

'And now, Miss Jeannette Perkins, where is your mistress?'

'Where everybody but a poor lady's maid is, or ought to be, at this time o'night—asleep in her bed.'

'She is not a very early bird in general,' observed the young man, incredulously, 'and especially on ball-nights. Why didn't she go to the ball?'

'That is the second time you have asked that question, Mr. Perry, though there's no one so fit to answer it as yourself. How could she go after what happened this evening?'

'I did not hear of anything having happened,' returned the young man sullenly.

'Ah, then, *I* did! What I heard was, that while my mistress was sitting at a window of the Canon's rooms, and the procession was a passing, a young gentleman, as ought to have known better, stood up in a boat and drank her health out of a quart pot.'

'I didn't stand up,' remarked Mr. Perry, indignantly.

'Maybe because you couldn't,' was the sharp rejoinder. 'Indeed, nobody who was in his right senses could possibly have put such a disgrace upon a young lady.'

'I didn't mean to do anything of that kind, of course!' said the other, exchanging his injured tone for one of apology.

'I suppose you thought it was paying her a compliment. Her friends, however, did not think so, at all events; and they took care that she should run no risk of another such being paid her the same evening. And that's why my poor dear young lady was not at the ball this evening.'

'She could have gone if she chose, for all that, I'll bet a shilling,' returned the young fellow, sulkily.

'Don't you be so free with your money, Mr. Perry—though it's very seldom you need any warning upon that score, I must say.

She has had such a talking to from Miss Aldred that her head is like to split: and then there's the thought of what the Canon will say to her about it, all over again, in the morning. Ball, indeed! The poor thing is fitter for her coffin; her pretty eyes all swollen with tears, and with saying to herself, as she is doing this very moment, "How could he, could he do so?"'

'Why you just told me she was asleep.'

'Well, and if I did, it was not of my own free will. Her first words when I went to tell her that I heard your knock at the door was, "It *can't* be Herbert, Jeannette. He would never do anything so rash—so mad." And when I told her that I was sure it was you, for you were mad enough for anything, "Then don't tell him how ill I am," she said, "or he will never forgive himself for the trouble he has caused me."'

'It seems to me there has been a great deal of fuss about nothing,' said Mr. Perry,

contemptuously; but at the same time he twisted his beard very tight, which Miss Jeannette Perkins knew to be a sign of discomfort with him.

'Nothing to you, of course, Mr. Perry. That's just what I told my mistress. "Whatever trouble befalls you, Miss," I said, "Mr. Perry will be able to bear it very bravely, so long as he doesn't share it." However, if you drive her to desperation, I am glad to think that you *will* share it. She is getting near that, I promise you. "Anything, anything," the poor young lady sometimes says to me, "must be better than this."'

'Better than what?' inquired the young man, stolidly.

'"Better than what?" That's a pretty question for one to put who is the cause of all her misery! Well, better than living a life of hypocrisy, which is made next to impossible by the goings on of the very person who has rendered it necessary. Better than deceiving

those who really love her for the sake of a man who only loves himself, and is bent only on pleasing himself, no matter though it risks her reputation.'

Mr. Perry uttered an exclamation of contempt.

'A woman's reputation, of course,' continued Miss Perkins, 'is of no consequence in your eyes. I was a fool to mention it. I should have been wiser to remind you that the little game you are now playing may lose not only her, but her fortune also. Her guardian has the sole control over it till she comes of age, remember; can't you hide your hand for even twelve months, and play the part of a gentleman? You aint an *habitual* drunkard, I suppose, that you must "break out" every week or so in this fashion.'

'I'd speak a little louder if I were you!' said Perry, gnawing at his beard.

'I would if I dared,' was the prompt reply. 'I would say what I think of you at the top

of my voice at noonday in the middle of Trumpington Street if I had my way. But I know that if Miss Aldred heard me, and suspected your presence, it would be the ruin of my young mistress, aye, and your ruin too, as you will see clearly enough to-morrow morning. To come here at this time of night, drunk!'

'You lie—I am not drunk.'

'Then your conduct is even worse; to come here at this time of night in your sober senses, with a reckless disregard of all consequences to my dear young mistress, is most vile and abominable.'

'I wanted to know why she was not at the ball.'

'Well, now you do know—go.'

And Miss Jeannette—though the name given to her at the baptismal font had in fact been Susan, which suited better perhaps with her patronymic, Perkins—pointed to the door with a dramatic gesture worthy of a French melodrama. Her vigorous onslaught had

been too much for Mr. Perry; men of his class can seldom stand against a woman's righteous indignation, unless she happens to be his wife. He had come to the 'Laurels' under a vague sense of ill-treatment, he was indignant at Sophy's absence from the ball, and wanted to know the 'reason why,' partly perhaps because he suspected the reason; he knew that he had earned her reproaches by drinking her health on the river, and therefore wished to establish a grievance on his own account. But Jeannette had routed him. He took up his battered college cap, and, muttering a grudging apology about 'not knowing it was quite so late,' and an ungracious hope that the young lady's head would not be so bad but that she could be seen the next day, he passed out into the night.

With a swift hand Jeannette locked the door behind him, and stood listening for his heavy step upon the iron stairs.

'Thank Heaven, that's over!' she ex-

claimed, with a great sigh of relief. 'Drat the man, I wish he was drownded!'

The aspiration was a pretty strong one, but there was little doubt of its genuineness. Her eyes had still the fire of indignation in them, her cheeks were still flushed with it; her bosom still palpitated with it, quite as much as with her late passionate eloquence. 'How Miss Sophy can stand it,' she went on, 'amazes me. It would wear me to skin and bone. And to think that there must be twelve months of it, and that much worse things may happen in twelve months, and at the end of them she will be his for life! I wouldn't be in her shoes, no, not for all her money, which—if she gets it at all, poor soul—will be his. If I were in her place the perlice would never suspect me, and I'd poison him. And yet, when he don't actually kick over the traces, as he has done to-day, how mighty cool she takes it! she'd a gone to the ball to-night—if it hadn't been for that other

young fellow—as sure as fate, aye, and have enjoyed herself too, and danced like a queen of the May. She'd dance on the brink of a precipice. For my part, I can think of nothing so horrid as running the risk of losing one's character, when one has done nothing to deserve it. No one can say that *I* ever played into Mr. Herbert Perry's hands; a close-fisted fellow, which is a thing I despise; but there's nothing I so much regret as having listened to Miss Sophy's entreaties (as though I hadn't known what a fool every girl is when she is in love), and for her sake——oh, Jemimaram, if he hasn't come back again!'

The interjection was caused by the same sharp tapping on the door-lock without, that had already summoned Jeannette from her duties about her young mistress. She had little doubt that she had heard aright, but she was very willing to believe herself deceived, The wind was still roaring and raging, and it was just possible that what she had just heard

was but the swinging of the iron gate of the balcony. Surely, surely, after that piece of her mind had been given him, and apparently with such excellent effect, Mr. Herbert Perry could not desire admittance a second time. Yet, as she listened with painful intentness, with her ear at the keyhole, there came again the well-known summons. 'It *is* him, drat him!' she murmured; and with the same precautions as before, but rendered more difficult by the angry trembling of her limbs, she opened the door a little space, when, without making it any wider, to her horror and amazement there slipped in, like a serpent, the attenuated frame of Mr. John Adair.

CHAPTER X.

VISITOR NUMBER TWO.

THE apparition of a total and unexpected stranger, under the circumstances we have just described, would have been alarming enough to any young woman; while the appearance of the intruder himself—limp, bedraggled, livid—was not calculated to restore confidence. One side of him was covered with mud (where he had lain on the ground, pending Mr. Perry's investigation of the garden gate); the other in sodden evening clothes, was hardly more respectably attired; his sole protection against the wild weather an undergraduate's gown, tied round his neck like a shawl—the only thing that could be said to the advantage of the

young man was that he did not look like a gay Lothario. Not for a moment, however, did Miss Perkins imagine him to be a vulgar thief or burglar. The undergraduate's gown, for which she had as quick an eye as an undergraduate for a petticoat, reassured her upon that point at once ; she staggered back in alarm, indeed, but it was not of a physical kind. Her feelings were similar to those of the gay mousquetaire, who, perceiving his beloved object and the ghost of her twin sister, whom he had betrayed, tending his sick bed together, exclaimed 'Voilà deux!' and went off in a fit. She felt that there was a second lover, though in the likeness of a drowned rat, come after her young mistress. Nay, after a few moments' reflection, though she had never so much as set eyes on him before, she even guessed who he was. It must be admitted, however, that even her natural acuteness could not have arrived at this conclusion without assistance. She was

Sophy's confidante—a safer one in some respects, and a much more dangerous one in others, than Henny Helford would have made—and she already knew all about Mr. John Adair. Her countenance, however, expressed nothing but unmitigated amazement.

The intruder, too, was hardly less surprised, and from the same cause. He had counted upon being confronted with a familiar face, and lo! he found himself in the presence of a stranger.

Being a woman, and a ready one, Miss Perkins was the first to speak.

'Who on earth are you, sir?' she inquired; 'and what are you come here about?'

'I am a friend of Canon Aldred's,' he said; 'and as I was coming home from the ball I saw a man slip into your garden. Perceiving by the light yonder'—he pointed to the candle—'that some of the family were still up, I thought it my duty to give you warning of it.'

An ordinary British maid-servant, under like circumstances, would have grasped with gratitude at the means thus suggested of explaining matters; but Jeannette was much too sharp to fall into such an error. It flashed upon her in a moment that the new-comer could not have made use of the same signal as his predecessor, had he not witnessed it; and, therefore, that all concealment as to that incident was useless. Moreover, here was an unexpected opportunity of doing a good turn to her young mistress, whom she knew had reason to stand in fear of this gentleman.

'My master should be greatly obliged to you, sir,' she said, hesitatingly. 'But the fact is, the person you saw is no burglar, as you suppose. I have just seen him myself, for he had the impudence to force his way in, though I did my best to prevent him: he is a friend of the family—though, as you may well say, after such conduct, hardly deserves

to remain so; he is not quite master of his own actions to-night, having been, I suppose, at the ball supper. If it got to be known, I am terrified to think what would happen: I don't mean to him, for he would have only himself to thank for it; but the Canon, I'm sure, would be so dreadfully distressed.'

'And your young mistress, Miss Gilbert, also, perhaps?' suggested Adair, drily.

'No doubt, and Miss Aldred likewise. There is nothing like your gentleman blackguard for doing mischief in a house.'

Wet as he was, a glow came into the cheeks of Mr. John Adair, and touched his trembling ears.

There is a general notion, set agoing, I am inclined to think, by the scoundrels themselves, that persons who behave in a rascally manner are unaware of it, or at all events that they gloze it over in their own minds, so that their conduct looks much more respectable; it is just possible that it may be so, when

rascality has become the rule and not the exception of their lives, but in a general way every one is conscious of the commission of a baseness, and no more likes to be reminded of it than of any other unpleasant fact.

'I have heard of a gentleman farmer and of a gentleman jockey,' returned the young man with a forced smile; 'but a gentleman blackguard, my good girl, is a contradiction in terms.'

'Well, I never heard him called by that name, sir,' returned Jeannette, simply; 'but there's plenty of them about. You would never believe it, but that young man had the impudence to call here, to-night, without the least thought of the scandal that might come of it, merely to inquire why my young mistress was not at the ball to-night—as though it was any business of his.'

'Impudent scoundrel!' ejaculated Mr. Adair, indignantly. 'And why didn't your young mistress go to the ball?'

'Well, surely there was reason enough, as you must very well know.' Adair's face darkened in a moment. He had all along suspected that it was the fear of meeting him, or rather of being under his surveillance, while she was in Perry's company, that had kept her away from the town-hall; and the supposition, as we know, was correct.

'I know of no reason,' he answered, sharply. 'It ought to have been a very good one, for only a few hours ago Miss Gilbert, with her own lips, promised me a dance. It was a great disappointment to me.'

'It naturally must have been,' admitted Jeannette, a light craft that could put about at a moment's notice. 'I am sure she is very sorry that it has so happened; but after Mr. Perry's conduct on the river—which I took for granted you had heard of—and for fear that he should misbehave himself again——'

'But Miss Gilbert knew all that when she

promised to dance with me,' interrupted Adair.

'And so did Miss Aldred know, only she had not told my mistress when she spoke to you, because she had had no opportunity of telling her, that nothing would induce her to let her go to the ball. This is only between ourselves, sir, if you please,' added the girl, earnestly; 'for what Miss Aldred gave out was that she had a headache and did not feel equal to going to the ball herself.'

'I did hear her say she had a headache,' observed Adair, greatly mollified. 'Then it was not your mistress's fault—that is, it was not of her own will—that she stopped at home?'

'Certainly not, sir; she has a better opinion of Mr. Perry perhaps than some of us have, and very likely did not think it possible that he would so offend again; but she is a young lady of spirit, and if she was once persuaded that Mr. Perry, or any other gentle-

man, was presuming upon any kindness she had shown him, or taking advantage of some fancied hold of her in any other way, she would go to her guardian at once, no matter what annoyance it cost her, and my master would know how to deal with him.'

'No doubt, no doubt,' said Adair, with the red on his cheeks, but in as careless a tone as he could assume; 'still, in the matter of Mr. Perry's unseasonable call, I understood you to say that Miss Gilbert did not wish the Canon to know about it.'

'She does not know about it herself, sir, as yet,' returned Miss Perkins, tartly; 'but it doesn't need a ghost from the grave, I should think, to know that no young lady wants to be made the talk of the town. I should have thought every gentleman who *was* a gentleman understood that.'

'I understand it perfectly well, my good girl; and I think I understand *you*,' said Adair, smiling, as he drew his purse from his

pocket. 'I should like your young mistress to know I had looked in, in case I might be of any use; but of course no one else shall know. Be so good as to give her my compliments, and say I shall do myself the honour of calling to-morrow.'

'Oh, thank you, sir.'

It was not Mr. Adair's polite promise that had thus excited Miss Perkins' gratitude, but the coin he had dropped into her hand, and which her nice sense of touch immediately informed her was a sovereign. 'Would you like an umbrella, sir? If you don't mind a gingham, I'll lend you mine.'

Declining this generous offer with a smile, and chucking the damsel under the chin (from a notion that that course of conduct was under the circumstances expected of him, rather than from any amatory impulse), Mr. Adair let himself out.

'He's as wet as a frog,' observed Miss Perkins, rubbing her chin with her frilled

apron, as she locked the door behind him. 'I hope that poor young man won't die of a cold. I had no idea when I first set eyes on him that he was such a good sort. One should never judge men, as men do women, by their looks. "Handsome is as handsome does," is my motto. Now, there's Mr. Perry; one would imagine to look at him that to do him ever so slight a service would be gold in any one's pocket; and yet a meaner man never stepped. To think that the very day he was married on the sly that he only gave half a sovereign to his wife's own maid! Bah! I hate such husbands!'

CHAPTER XI.

TWO GIRLS.

'My dear Henny, what on earth takes you out so early?' exclaimed Mrs. Helford to her daughter on the morning after the ball night. The question was put with reproachful severity, as though Henny was committing an act of desertion, and her bonnet and shawl were the Queen's uniform about to be unlawfully disposed of in defiance of the statute.

'If you want me, dear mamma, I will stay; but I thought I would just look in at the "Laurels" to inquire after Miss Aldred. Her head was so bad last night, you remember, that she was unable to chaperone Sophy to the ball.'

'You will do as you please, my dear, of course; but, in my opinion, charity should begin at home.'

And the widow sighed, like some Cassandra who perceives the catastrophe to which all things are hastening, but is powerless to control the course of events.

Mrs. Helford was a lady of mature years, but of a tall and massive frame, to which her mourning weeds were quite unable to impart their usual impression of helplessness and desolation. She was a widow of course, though her bereavement was by no means a recent one; but she was too plump for the part. She had also another excuse for the melancholy tone and air which was habitual to her: she had lost her only son, Henny's elder brother. I say 'excuse,' for as a matter of fact it could hardly have been what old Burton calls 'a cause' for melancholy. Richard Helford had been 'a mauvais sujet' from his cradle; and after a dissipated youth

his intention of marrying the barmaid. In that case (though it was from fear, perhaps, as much as love, for the young man was a Tartar) she had been ready enough to make the best of the matter; the girl, after all, was virtuous; the society of dear Richard was an education for anybody, and would doubtless make a lady of her in time; he might have done worse; he would now settle down (which he did like a ship); in short, there was scarcely any opposition. But Mr. Frederic Irton was much too young; his fellowship was of no use to him, since he lost it by marriage; the Bar was a most uncertain profession, &c., &c.

'But, dear mamma,' Henny would interpose at this point, 'Frederick will be a solicitor.'

'Quite as uncertain, my dear, and not so desirable; the lower branch of the profession. It is not as if you were an heiress and independent of fortune.'

Some girls would not have scrupled to hint that they would have been independent but for circumstances over which the mother had had control, but had not exercised it. But Henny only sighed, and listened in patience.

In the end, she had been grudgingly permitted to engage herself to the man of her choice. But she could not talk of him to her mother as a daughter wishes to talk on such a subject. In one particular, Mrs. Helford had certainly found nothing to complain of. 'I only hope, Henny,' she had somewhat ungraciously observed, 'that this new attraction will not cause you to neglect poor Stevie.' So far from doing so, it had, if possible, drawn the bonds of her affection for the child still closer. She was resolved that he at least should never lack a loving confidante; and all his little secrets were her own.

On the road of love and duty, indeed, Henny Helford was a constant traveller; and,

no matter how rough it may be, it is rarely an unpleasant one. Nor was it in her case, truth to say, so rough as it looked. Her mother's affection for her was deep and firm enough under the mud, and even more genuine, perhaps, than her more demonstrative regard for her dead boy. In the latter case, it was not that she 'did protest too much,' but that she found protestation necessary to still certain misgivings and even self-reproaches in respect to him; and I think her daughter guessed something of this, and forgave her the more readily. At all events, notwithstanding that she passed her life in what may have seemed to young ladies of spirit a dull round, Henny Helford was a happy girl, and there was a young lady of spirit next door who would have given her ears, and her earrings too, to change places with her.

'You will not be gone long at all events, I do hope,' said Mrs. Helford, perceiving that Henny had not laid down her bonnet and

shawl on the first summons to surrender. 'You must not forget Stevie's lessons.'

As Henny taught and heard them every day with the same regularity with which she said her prayers, it was not very likely that she would forget them. But the fact was, Mrs. Helford was one of those women who share with some domestic animals the same repugnance to be left alone. Pet dogs will trot to the door directly they find themselves in solitude, and sniff and sob under it till some friendly human being comes to relieve their ennui; and cats will leave the hearth-rug and take up their quarters, for the same reason, on the very threshold, at the risk of being knocked over by the next incomer. The widow, of course, didn't do that; but, having no resources of her own except fancy needlework, she craved for company. Conversation she did not desire; she could supply talk in any quantity; but she wanted a listener, to whom she could pour out her woes—

past, present, and to come—like tears out of a tea-pot. I have sometimes thought if such people could have a telephone fitted up for them in which they could discourse their full, with replies from the other end provided at long intervals by contract, human life would go on more smoothly for many of us.

It may be inquired, since this lady was really devoted to her grandchild, why the little boy was not sent for to relieve guard in her daughter's absence. But the fact was that Stevie's remarks when she was alone with him rather disconcerted Mrs. Helford. Though legitimate enough, he was a child of nature, and embarrassed his grandmother by his plain speaking. He was thin and small as a shrimp, with a head ever so much too large for him, so that he looked like a note of admiration; but his character was by no means in consonance with his appearance in that respect. He was always rubbing the gilt off some gingerbread theory which other

children swallow without inquiry. He had endeared himself, I am afraid, to the Canon by his scepticism, quite as much as by any charm of childhood. The divine had quoted to him the Miltonic account of the eating of the Forbidden Fruit as a lesson against greediness.

Such delight till then, as seemed in fruit she never tasted.

* * * * *

Greedily she engorged without restraint.

This view of our first parent at meals delighted Stevie, but he was incredulous as to the cause of the catastrophe that 'brought death into the world and all our woe.'

He thought the motive too inadequate. 'It couldn't have been an apple,' he said. 'It must have been a peach.'

Adam's confession, too, was not received by Stevie with the approval with which the poet would appear to regard it.

This woman whom thou madest to be my help,

* * * * *

She gave me of the tree, and I did eat.

'I think that Mr. Adam was a tell-tale-tit,' was Stevie's comment after reflection.

The Canon rubbed his chin, and shook with silent mirth. 'A remarkable child,' he murmured; of course Milton was right. But here was another view of the matter, as it appeared to a young gentleman of seven, four thousand years afterwards; 'a very remarkable child.'

And if Stevie did not spare the father of all mankind, it was not to be expected that his more immediate relatives should escape his criticism. It was no wonder that Mrs. Helford, with her artificial ways and fictitious regrets, was rather afraid of the child. He would suddenly look up from his toys when he was alone with her, and, in the gravest and most serious of tones, inquire, 'Why are you always so melancholy, grandmamma?'

'I am not melancholy, my child, or at least I hope I don't appear to be so; I always try to be cheerful.'

This remark, as was his wont, the child turned over in his mind as a cow chews the cud, and then replied—

'Then I wish you would try to be melancholy, grandmamma.'

The favourite topic of Mrs. Helford, her lost Richard, was closed to her in her grandson's company. She did not venture to discourse upon his father to this plain-speaking child, to whom no subject was safe from investigation, and who had so pitiless a habit of eliciting truth.

Therefore it was that Stevie was not sent for to keep his grandmother company on this occasion, but remained, to his own great content, in his nursery, playing with the great Noah's Ark 'Uncle' Fred had just sent him from town. As his bath was handy, it naturally struck him to try the ark's powers of flotation, and when with its shifting cargo it instantly turned bottom upwards, ex-

claimed, 'Now I wonder how Mr. Noah got over *that*.'

Unconscious of this new outbreak of scepticism on the part of her little favourite, Henny took her way to the 'Laurels.' Her mission as we know, was a very simple one, and to many clever folks will doubtless appear contemptible. Who ever dreams of going to inquire after anybody's headache? Well, some people do, and these are the very last in the world to expect any one to do the same in their case. They do not forget that their friend had a sore throat on Thursday, or complained of the toothache on Wednesday, though the sufferer himself may have forgotten all about it. For my part (and especially when it is *my* health that is asked after), I admire this tender solicitude. The matter, indeed, may not be so important as the price of stocks; but such inquiries are characteristic when one considers how many dear friends of one's own may be dead and

buried for all that our own personal interest in them has informed us to the contrary.

It must be confessed, however (for she was but woman), that Henny had some other motive for her visit beside kind inquiries after Miss Aldred's head. She had had a letter from 'dear Fred' that morning, of which she had not spoken to a human being; and what is Love without a sympathiser? What is the very best thing that ever occurred to us in all our lives if we have not a soul to whom to tell it? And though, as has been hinted, there was little reciprocity on Sophy's part, Henny made a confidante of Sophy. She was by no means displeased, then, to find upon inquiry not only that Miss Aldred had no headache, 'leastways,' as Mr. Barclay 'had heard on,' but had gone out, and that Miss Sophy was alone in her boudoir.

This was a little cosy room adjoining her bedroom, and by no means to be confounded with that downstairs apartment, the door of

which moved to the 'open sesame' of a tink against its keyhole. It was lined with books, and would undoubtedly have been the sanctum of the master of the house had he not been better provided for in that way in college. As it was, it had a piano in it, a fernery, no aroma of tobacco, a prevailing neatness, and other signs of female occupation and supremacy. As Henny tripped upstairs unannounced, she could hear the piano, which, on the other hand, prevented Sophy from hearing her friend's gentle knock at the door. There was a song going on, too; so sweet and pathetic that Henny would not have interrupted it on any account, but stood, with her hand on the open door, gazing with affectionate admiration on the performer. Sophy was in her dressing-gown, like a pretty flower in a pink jar, and in a low melodious voice, laden with feeling, was addressing the instrument itself, as a worshipper an idol.

Oh, friend, whom glad or grave, we seek
  Heaven-holding shrine,
I ope thee, touch thee, hear thee speak,
  And peace is mine.
No fairy casket full of bliss
  Outvalues thee.
Love only wakened with a kiss,
  More sweet may be.

Here she stopped, and sighed. The recollection of a vanished pleasure, or the shattered illusion of one, seemed to overcome her. During the first lines of the next verse her voice had a mechanical ring, as though she was still thinking of what had gone before.

To thee when our full hearts o'erflow,
  In griefs or joys,
Unspeakable emotions owe
  A fitting voice.

And then again, at the conclusion, her heart went once more with her voice.

Mirth flies to thee, and Love's unrest,
  And memory dear,
And sorrow, with her tightened breast,
  Comes for a tear.

Here the singer herself burst into tears,

and flung herself forward on the keys in a perfect paroxysm of woe.

Alarmed and distressed beyond measure, Henny had still presence of mind to withdraw from the room, pulling the door softly behind her. Whatever was the cause of her friend's wretchedness, it was clear that she could wish no one to be a witness to it. But what *could* be the cause? Sophy was mistress of her own actions, and, to all practical purposes, of her own fortune; beloved by her guardian and her adopted aunt, a favourite wherever she went, and apparently without a wish ungratified. It was true that in Henny's eyes she had made a mistake in encouraging the advances of Mr. Perry, but there was nothing serious in them as yet. She had not compromised herself with him in any way; and even already, as Henny thought, she had noticed the young man was not so importunate as he had been. Was it possible that any rejection of his attentions

could have produced this outburst of feeling? If so, while pitying her friend from the bottom of her heart, Henny felt that her behaviour in the matter in question was by no means to be regretted. Sympathetic as she was, she had never imagined these two young people on the same footing as that on which Frederic Irton and herself stood. That they were not actually engaged she had felt almost certain; but perhaps she had been mistaken, and Sophy was now bewailing an estrangement, which all those who loved her would agree was for her good. But though Henny could not prevent this consolatory reflection occurring to her, her heart was full of the tenderest compassion. What had happened (if it had happened) was none the less hard, she knew, for poor Sophy, in the meantime.

After a minute or two, during which she heard the piano gently closed, Henny knocked again, and was admitted.

The traces of tears upon Sophy's face,

as they embraced, were distinct enough to Henny's eyes, but she ignored them.

'I came to inquire after your aunt, my dear,' she said cheerfully; 'but as I hear she has gone out, I hope her headache has departed.'

'I did not know she had had a headache,' said Sophy, with averted eyes.

'Why, my dear, I thought that was the reason you didn't go to the ball last night?'

'To be sure, so it was; I had forgotten.'

Henny was amazed at her coolness; she had no experience of that philosophic calm with which those who live a life of duplicity are enabled to meet all minor embarrassments. Then, as if to make up for her want of solicitude in one direction by a show of it in another, Sophy inquired after Stevie.

'Oh, he is much better to-day, and in the seventh heaven of happiness. Frederic has sent him a Noah's Ark.'

'And I hope you had something too,' said Sophy, smiling.

'Yes, indeed. Such a nice long letter!'

'What, and no present? That would have made me very jealous of Stevie!'

'What do I want with presents?' said Henny, simply; 'what can be nicer than to hear from him? To see the very words his hand has written, to feel the very thoughts he describes in them? It is the one thing that makes his absence endurable. I often wonder what people who loved one another, and were separated, did before the post-office was invented.'

'Well, they did without it, I suppose,' said Sophy, drily. 'Just as poor people who can't read or write have to do now.'

'How I pity them!' said Henny, softly. 'That must be to be poor indeed.'

'I hope you may never lose your illusions, my dear. It is quite refreshing to hear you talk.'

'Illusions! If you really mean what you say, Sophy,' returned the other, earnestly, 'it is clear to me that you have never known what love is.'

'Have I not?' smiled Sophy, bitterly and with effort, as an Indian smiles at the stake. 'Well, perhaps you are right; while it lasted, however, it really did seem like love.'

'While it lasted! Nay, that proves my case at once,' urged Henny. 'You can never have loved truly. "Love is love for evermore."'

'How can you talk so foolishly, Henny?' returned Sophy, with irritation. 'What experience can you have of that? You have been engaged to Mr. Irton for six months. Now, supposing you fell in love with him at first——'

'I did not,' interrupted Henny.

'Very good! We will say he "grew upon you," like the taste for truffles or

caviare. That makes your term of true love even shorter. Doubtless, you thought it wrong to love him till he had declared himself. Your devotion was "ready laid" for that, like a housemaid's fire.'

'Well, perhaps it was something of that kind,' said Henny, blushing furiously; 'though I don't thank you for the comparison. You really seem to take a pleasure, Sophy, in ridiculing what it seems to me a girl should hold as something sacred.'

'I hope not; still, it was said by a great philosopher that no one can have any true faith who cannot afford to laugh at it. If you don't see its weak points you are in a fool's paradise. And as to love, you must admit that there are contingencies; for instance, people sometimes get tired of one another.'

'I could never get tired of Frederic.'

'Well, I won't be so rude as to say that he could ever tire of you; but still, there

surely are cases where such a thing happens —where the man has mistaken a passing fancy for a life's devotion; or has even no capacity for love except his passing fancy. How are girls like you and me to know what men are?'

'If a man be a good brother and a good son, if he is gentle and generous, if children take to him——'

'My dear Henny, you are thinking of your Frederic,' broke in Sophy, with irritation. 'It is most natural that you should be always thinking of him, but it is not argument. And all that you know even of him does not prove that he will make a good husband. Moreover, how few girls have such opportunities of judging of a man's character? They know he dances well, and is a good partner at lawn-tennis; they think that he looks like a Greek god: his smile, his tender speech, intoxicates them. They think he will be their slave for ever.'

'I don't call that love,' said Henny, firmly; 'I call that folly.'

'And you are very right; but it is often put to the same test as love. They marry him.'

'Then I pity them.'

'Yes; but not as they pity themselves,' returned the other, quickly. 'To find their Greek god has clay feet; that his speech is sometimes thick with wine; that he can frown as well as smile; and that in place of a slave they have got a tyrant—that is what some girls discover when it is too late.'

'Well, well; to be forewarned is to be forearmed,' said Henny, smiling. 'You must be mad indeed, my dear Sophy, if, with this picture in your mind of such a possible future, you ever make a mistake of that kind.'

'True; I must be mad, indeed,' said Sophy.

She spoke with a gravity that, upon the

whole, gave comfort to her companion. The great fault she found with Sophy was that she treated all subjects in the same light way; not like Stevie, from ignorance, or the absence of a sense of proportion, but from aversion to serious thoughts of any kind, which she stigmatised generally as the 'doldrums.' It was evident, however, that she was not without her reflections concerning matrimony. As for the cynicism of her tone, Henny was inclined to ascribe it to some dissatisfaction at Mr. Perry's conduct, aroused tardily enough, and which was certainly not to be regretted. She had not heard of what had happened on the river the previous evening; but she knew the young man was unpopular, and deservedly so, with Sophy's people.

'You will be glad to hear, Sophy, she continued, after a little pause, 'that Frederic is to be taken into partnership with Mr. Shepstone.'

'I *am* glad, Henny,' said Sophy, with a

cordial kiss. 'That is good news, indeed. Then yours will not be such a very long engagement?'

'It will not be a short one, Sophy; dear mamma, you see, is so loth to part with me, and Fred must live in London. I shouldn't wonder if an heiress like yourself, with so many attractions too, better than all the money in the world, were married first, after all.'

Sophy smiled, and murmured 'Who can tell?' with an indifferent air. If Henny had not been lost in rapture at the prospect, however distant, of her own happiness, she could not but have noticed the depression of her companion.

'Even when we do marry,' she went on gaily, 'we shall perhaps only have that terrible "three hundred a year," which the papers all tell us is madness for a young couple to begin housekeeping upon; but Frederic says it all depends upon whether

there is method in the madness; and he has the highest confidence in my domestic economy. It is, of course, a very small sum.'

'What does it matter?' cried Sophy, vehemently. 'If you really love one another, that is better than thousands a year—and much more rare.'

'Well, so *I* think, of course; though I confess I am as much surprised as delighted at finding you take the same view. There will be no visits to Paris nor even to the seaside for us, you know; and very little gaiety even at home. I should be quite content even were that to last for ever; but Frederic says, as to the three hundred a year question, that if a man starts with that and never wins anything more for himself, it is obvious that nature intended him for the lowest rung of the social ladder; whereas men of diligence and ability are sure to win their way in the world. Of course we shall never be rich, like

you; but, perhaps, in time we may make some pleasant little nest for ourselves; and, oh! my dear Sophy, how charming it will be to welcome you to it! Think of each of us having a Fred of our own—only yours, perhaps, will be a Sir Frederick, or even a Lord Frederick—to talk about; and what a pleasure it will be to look back upon these old days, not regretfully, you know, but with sober content!'

'You have happy dreams, dear Henny,' said Sophy, slowly.

'Dreams! Well, perhaps they are! still I live in them, just as much as in present realities. I sometimes think you would be happier than you are if you had another string to your bow, as it were, if you added the delight of looking forward to the pleasures of to-day, which you say are enough for you. On the other hand, you enjoy yourself so thoroughly that perhaps your real, though indeed it would be very difficult,' put in

Henny with a blush, 'would surpass my ideal.'

'My ideal is on those shelves,' said Sophy, quietly, pointing to the books around her; they consisted chiefly of works which people who read travels on weekdays, and sermons on Sundays, are wont to describe somewhat superciliously as 'light literature.' She was a girl of intelligence and imagination, and read a good many novels. 'When I want to be romantic I turn on the Lefanu tap.'

'I don't deny the quality of it,' answered Henny, with a smile, 'but I must confess it is rather too strong drink for me. I was kept awake for nights by those dreadful stories you lent me—"*In a Glass darkly*;" their attraction is immense, but then I don't want to have my blood curdled. The only real pleasure I derive from such books is the same one feels on awaking from a nightmare, and feeling that it isn't true. The things he describes are not everyday matters; if there was

a mystery hanging over the "Firs"' (so Mrs. Helford's house was called), 'or a skeleton in the cupboard at the Canon's rooms at the college, or if you yourself were carrying about with you some secret too terrible for utterance, why, life would be unendurable.'

'It would not be worth living, at all events,' assented Sophy, with a shudder.

'My dear Sophy, are you sure you are quite well?' inquired Henny, with solicitude. Up to this moment Sophy had been standing with her back to the window, but she had unconsciously moved into the light, and it revealed a face very white and worn, with dark rings round the eyes.

'I have had a bad night, Henny, that's all. Perhaps in spite of what I told you yesterday,' she added with a forced smile, 'I was a wee bit disappointed at not going to the ball.'

'I wish you would see Dr. Newton; he promised to pay his farewell visit to Stevie to-

day. Now, when he comes, do let me send him in to look at you.'

'No, thank you, I don't believe in doctors; besides, I shall be all right to-morrow.'

'Well, I shall come and see, and if you are not, I shall bring him in myself. I must go back now, dear, because I promised mamma not to stay long, and in the meantime do not terrify yourself with melodrama. It is quite out of your line, which is that of a charming little fairy in an extravaganza. God bless you, my darling!'

'If *you* ask Him, perhaps He may,' was the unexpected reply. 'Do you ever pray for me, Henny?'

'Pray for you, why of course I do, just as I pray for mamma and for dear little Stevie. Why do you ask such a question?'

'I don't know, I'm sure,' said Sophy, lightly, and as if repenting of her late access of gravity. 'I suppose it was that story of my guardian's about his bedmaker that put it

into my mind; she told him the other day that she always prayed for him on account of his kindness to her. "That's very good of you, Mrs. Baldwin," he said. "Lor bless you, sir! not at all," she answered; "it aint a mossel o' trouble to put your name in along with the rest, while I'm about it." '

'The Canon is really too bad, Sophy,' exclaimed Henny, unable to repress a smile. 'I don't think he has any idea how he shocks people sometimes. And yet he is such a kind, good man; he always endeavours to do the very best for everybody. I am sure you must feel that even when you are not quite at ease with him.'

'I feel it more then than at any other time,' said Sophy, gently.

The two girls embraced one another affectionately. Henny thought she had never seen her friend so dutifully inclined and reasonable. If she did have her little troubles they would be soon over, and if they involved giving Mr.

Perry his *congé*, it would be a matter of sincere congratulation. They were not over yet, however, or had still left regrets behind them; for as Henny let herself out of the front door of the 'Laurels' as was her custom, she once more heard the plaintive notes of Sophy's piano, and pictured to herself that woful little face as she had seen it, singing—

> And sorrow with her tightened breast,
> Comes for a tear.

CHAPTER XII.

A TURN FOR BUSINESS.

'WELL, Adair, how are you this morning? None the worse, I hope, for our little symposium of yesterday—though, by-the-bye, you left us early, like a true knight, to be the ladies' escort.'

It was the Canon who was speaking, though without paying much attention to the person addressed. Adair had looked in, after lecture, as usual, to have a word with him about the Concordance, but found him otherwise engaged.

A large book, with clasp and key, was laying open before him on the desk; and the Canon, in his dressing-gown, with pen in

hand and knitted brow, was conning its contents.

'You find me at very uncongenial work, my lad,' he went on, 'poring over debts and credits. The sight of this ledger has brought those lines of Keats into my head :—

> Why were they proud?
> Because red-lined accounts are richer than the songs of Grecian years?

They haunt these "brought forwards" like a ghost, and I can't get them out of it; and even at my best I am but a sorry accountant.'

'Can I help you in any way?'

'You may try, if you like, while I put my coat on. The fact is, the money is not mine, or I should not trouble about a deficit of twenty pounds, extending over Heaven knows how long. It's a mortgage of my ward's, at five per cent., and I can't make the income from it what it should be. One can't rob the orphan, you see—or, at least, *I* can't; so I suppose I shall have to make the loss

good out of my own money. There are, or should be, six half-yearly entries of it; and all I know about them is that they don't tally,' and with that the Canon withdrew into his bed-chamber.

To thread the intricacies of a balance-sheet while a gentleman is putting his coat on, requires not so much 'a head for business' as very rapid powers of calculation and a keen eye for figures. These John Adair possessed in a very high degree, and he went at his work at once, with the vigour of a navvy at a barrow. In five minutes he put his finger on the error—which, indeed, was no very difficult task for him, though it had puzzled the worshipper of Milton almost as much as it would have puzzled his blind idol. The problem done, one would have imagined that its elucidator would have closed the book, as it was of a private nature; on the contrary, Mr. John Adair (keeping his ears very attentive for the opening of the Canon's

bedroom door), ran his eyes with diligence and despatch through its opening lines—'Statement of account of moneys in trust for my ward Sophia Gilbert, etc., etc.'—whereby he made the discovery that that young lady would not have less than 20,000*l.* of her own; or, rather, that that amount was settled upon her. The young man had what is called 'a turn for figures,' but figures had never interested him so much before. He had known, or guessed, that Sophy was well dowered; though, to do him justice, no such knowledge was needed to fan his flame; but the precise information he had just received was certainly of an encouraging nature.

'Still in the labyrinth, I conclude?' exclaimed the Canon, reappearing in full costume, though it was not the perfection of neatness. The art of tying a white cravat was unknown to him, and he had found difficulties even in a shoe-string.

'Well, sir, I trust I have found the clue.'

'What, in ten minutes? Good, venturous youth,

> I love thy courage much, and bold emprise,

but the thing is impossible.'

'Where your mistake lay, sir, continued the young man, quietly, 'was in the different rates paid for the mortgages. There must have been some proviso whereby the interest was made four per cent. if paid when due, and five per cent. if any delay occurred in the payment.'

'Why, this is magic, my lad,' cried the Canon, admiringly. 'How on earth did you find this out?

> By hoary Nereus' wrinkled look,
> And the Carpathian wizard's hook,
> By scaly Triton's winding shell,
> And old soothsaying Glaucus' spell?

or by natural instinct? It's quite true there was such a proviso in the mortgage, though I myself had clean forgotten it.'

'I believe, as you say, sir, I have some

natural instinct for mathematical errors,' said Adair, modestly.

This might be true, but it was not the whole truth. It had been a part of the young man's duties while in the service of his patron to assist him in his business matters, and such a proviso in a mortgage-deed is by no means uncommon.

But to the Canon it looked like an extempore conjuring feat accomplished by an amateur. Though little like the rest of the world in many things, he resembled them in this—that the exhibition of a talent he did not himself possess impressed him out of all proportion to its merit. This it is which lies at the root of the inexplicable desire for information among dull people. For knowledge for its own sake they care nothing; but the opportunity of exciting the admiration of those more ignorant even than themselves, by a display of it—if it is but how Tel-el-Kebir is pronounced in its own country—is seized

upon with avidity. The pre-eminence of our public schools is founded upon it; and should they cease to teach Greek, they will lose the confidence of their patrons and cease to excite the envy of the public. The Canon, who knew something of Greek, but nothing of mortgages, beheld in his young friend a sort of genius in his way, a man born for affairs.

'It is most extraordinary,' he resumed, 'how men's gifts differ. That you should so easily quell the might of these "hellish charms" woven by some lawyer, "whose bare wand can unthread *my* joints and crumble all my sinews," astounds me. My poor friend Gilbert ought to have made you his trustee (only you were in petticoats at the time), instead of me.'

'Nay, sir, I should think you were the very man for such a post,' returned Adair. 'A man of probity and honour, who knows little of business matters, and would therefore

never move in them without legal advice, is made for a trustee.'

'Granting the probity, which I hope I possess—a very just observation, young man. There is one thing to be said,' added the Canon, smiling. 'However little I know of business matters, I know more than my ward. She has a banking account of her own, you must know; and the other day, when I reproved her because she had overdrawn her account, replied, "But that is impossible, guardian, since I have still three cheques left in my cheque-book."'

Adair laughed with the speaker, but observed, gravely enough, that it was neither natural nor desirable that young ladies should give their attention to money matters when they had friends and advisers.

'The Law be praised,' said the Canon, earnestly, 'my poor Sophy's money can never slip out of her own hands.'

To judge by his tone and face, you

would have imagined that there would otherwise have been some danger of its slipping through them, and getting into other hands; then "apropos des bottes" as it seemed, he added:—

'Did you hear whether there was a full attendance at the ball last night?'

'I was there myself, sir,' said the young man, gravely.

'You? Oh, I forgot. My ward said yesterday, by-the-bye, that she had met you at another ball; I should have thought dancing would have been the last sort of amusement to have attracted you; but I suppose it's the figures.' The Canon was by no means in a joking humour, but it was not in his nature to smother a witticism.

'I conclude,' he went on with unruffled gravity, 'that all the world and his wife, or at least his daughters, were there.'

'The room was very crowded, though chiefly with men, sir.'

'Um! All the boating men were there, of course?'

'I should think so; I have not much acquaintance with them, however, but there were one or two I recognised.'

'Mr. Perry, I suppose, was there,' said the Canon, pretending to look among his MSS. for something he had mislaid. 'The fact is,' he went on, in explanation, since Adair maintained a silence that under the circumstances was a little embarrassing, 'though I know very little of the young man myself, he visits at the "Laurels" occasionally, and I am afraid is inclined to presume upon it. He behaved last night on the river in a very demonstrative, not to say offensive, way; you noticed it no doubt yourself?'

'I saw that he looked towards your windows, sir, as he drank his claret cup; but it is probable he only meant to pay you a compliment. Upon such an occasion it is allow-

able for the captain of the boats to be a little excited.'

'At all events, I hope for the sake of his family—the young man behaved himself at the ball?'

Adair kept silence, and shifted his eyes uneasily, like one who is inclined to shirk cross-examination.

'If anything happened, Adair,' said the Canon, earnestly, 'I will thank you to tell it me, for it may be necessary to forbid that young man my house. You naturally object, and I respect you for it, to tell tales against a fellow-student; but this is a matter which concerns me nearly, and of which I have no other means of informing myself.'

'Nothing at all happened, sir, I do assure you,' said the other, gently; 'indeed, Mr. Perry did not dance at all.'

There was a hint of concealment in the young man's tone which did not escape his companion.

'Not dance? Is it possible you mean he was too drunk to dance?'

'I should be sorry to say that, sir; but between ourselves, and since you compel me to speak out, it is my impression that he was in liquor. On the other hand, it is quite possible that I may be mistaken. I am not in a fast set myself, and what may seem to some men mere hilarity——'

'Pooh! every one knows whether a man is drunk or sober,' put in the Canon, moving with quick strides about the room.

'Indeed, sir, I would not have you imagine that Mr. Perry exposed himself to public reproach; nor, indeed, did he stay long at the ball; but after an hour or so went away, as it seemed to me—though it is true I have had the misfortune to incur his displeasure — in rather an ill humour.'

'I trust that while he remained, being in the condition you mention,' said the Canon,

uneasily, 'he did not venture to speak to my sister or Miss Gilbert.'

'He did not, sir. Neither of your ladies was at the ball.'

'Sophy not at the ball,' exclaimed the Canon. 'Why, how was that?'

The young man smiled, and slightly shrugged his shoulders.

'To be sure. How should you know?'

'I am not in the ladies' confidence,' said Adair; 'but, if I might hazard a guess, I think the reason may have been some slight indisposition of Miss Aldred's. I heard her say, as we were going home last night, that she had a headache.'

'Very likely! there is doubtless not much the matter; nevertheless, I must go home and see about it,' said the Canon, nervously.

'I hope you will find all well, sir—— With regard to what we have been talking about,' added Adair, with hesitation, 'I trust you will consider the matter as confidential.

It was much against my inclination, as you will bear me witness, that I said anything to Mr. Perry's disparagement; but if it were known to the ladies, it would naturally prejudice them against me.'

'I will take care that it is not known, and that it shall do nothing of the kind,' replied the Canon, warmly. 'In my opinion, your behaviour has done you great credit, Adair. I am greatly obliged to you also for unravelling these accounts. Our Concordance must stand over for this morning.' The Canon had put on his hat and gown, and had his hand on the door, when he suddenly turned round and said, 'If you have no better engagement for this evening, and will come and dine at the "Laurels," we shall be quite alone.'

'I shall do so with great pleasure, sir,' said Adair, with a light in his eye that was a greater compliment to his inviter than the most laboured acknowledgments.

'Poor young fellow,' mused the Canon, as he fluttered home in the May breeze; 'dines out deuced seldom, I dare say. A glass of good Léoville will bring some colour into his cheeks.' Then, as if the mention of the wine had suggested the observation, he added, 'It is clear to me that that fellow Perry was as drunk as a lord last night: what a mercy it was Sophy didn't go, since she could hardly have refused to dance with him had he asked her! It was no doubt because she was not there that he went off in the sulks. It is high time I should put my foot down as regards that matter. How can Sophy encourage such a fellow? I believe girls choose their lovers as, when they were children, they chose their dolls—for their looks and their movable eyes. I dare say because Adair is not good-looking she will be barely civil to him; yet he is one in a thousand; so intelligent, so observant—I can't think how that clause in the mortgage could have

escaped my recollection—and withal so modest. If he had but a little money—though, indeed, with those talents of his he cannot fail to make it—I could wish Sophy no better luck than to choose such a young fellow.'

CHAPTER XIII.

THE CANON PUTS HIS FOOT DOWN.

'So, my dear Maria, you were not at the ball last night, I hear,' said the Canon, as he entered the drawing-room where his sister was sitting alone. 'I can't say, under the circumstances, I am sorry, except for the cause. I hope your head is better.'

'That is what everybody is saying this morning,' smiled Miss Aldred, a little uneasily. She didn't like that expression, 'under the circumstances,' beneath which she shrewdly suspected lay some reference to Mr. Perry, concerning whom, as we know, she had promised Sophy to make no revelation. 'Henny has been here this morning to inquire

about it; and I overheard her mother—to whom I was not at home, for I am tired to-day, and her conversation is a little trying—asking Barclay "How's her head?" as if I was a ship.'

'Still, I suppose you had really a headache last night, since it prevented your escorting Sophy to the ball—unless, indeed, it was merely an excuse and you had some more valid reason.'

'Well, I *had* a headache, William. I think it was the cheering on the river. But the fact is, Sophy herself did not seem much inclined to go, so we agreed to give it up.'

Aunt Maria felt that this was not a successful speech; but she was a little alarmed at her brother's manner, as well as at the guess he had made at the actual condition of affairs. It was very unusual with him to take interest in their domestic proceedings, or to question any arrangements she made for herself and Sophy.

'And why did she not want to go?' persisted the Canon. 'She is generally fond enough of balls.'

'My dear brother, if you knew as much of girls as I do' (he did very nearly), 'you would understand that they are as full of their fancies as you wise men are of your great thoughts. The things they like to-day they dislike to-morrow, and for the same reason that made little Stevie, next door, throw all his toys into the dust-hole—because he was tired of them.'

'Then, I hope Sophy is tired of her rag doll, Mr. Herbert Perry, and doesn't want to play with *him* any more.'

A startling speech from the lips of any one; but from those of the Canon like thunder out of a blue sky. It was lucky for Miss Aldred that his indignation supplied him with a fine flow of words, during which she was able to collect her thoughts; or, in her alarm—since concealment was now out of the

question—she might have told him more than was necessary.

'I shouldn't complain,' continued her brother, 'if Sophy had fallen in love with some curled darling—such as one sees in the hairdressers' windows—but the man she is encouraging is not only a fool, but a vicious fool; perhaps even a scamp, or a scoundrel. Of course you noticed, what everybody else noticed, last evening, how he drank her health in public—conduct which "nothing can excuse," as the phrase goes, but Drink. It is no excuse in my eyes, however, but rather an aggravation. Moreover, it cannot be said that it was a temporary exhibition. I hear, on the best authority, that he went to the ball in a state of liquor. That is why I said that I was not sorry you did not go. And I shall be still better pleased to hear that the reason of Sophy's absence was the apprehension of meeting him, after what had taken place at my rooms.'

'I really and truly believe it was,' answered Aunt Maria. 'I did not mean to say anything about it to you, because I promised Sophy not to do so; but that is what, on the whole, I gathered from her. I don't think she has any such fancy for him as she had; and if she is ashamed of him, of course that is a great point gained; only I entreat you to be careful in what you say to her. Opposition is the soil on which this sort of love affair thrives best.'

'That's all very well in plays, Maria; but in real life it does not do to trust to a girl's having her eyes opened to her lover's unworthiness by his own misdoings. Upon one thing I shall tell Sophy I have made up my mind; Mr. Perry never crosses my threshold again.'

'As to that matter, you will, of course, do as you please, William,' answered Aunt Maria. 'The master of the house is at liberty to choose his guests; though, on the other

hand, Sophy may insist on seeing her own friends elsewhere. But I don't think it will do for you to speak to Sophy yourself about the matter—at least, not now. She is not in a fit state for it. She rose late, and I did not see her till after I had come in from the town, when I was quite shocked at her appearance. If she had gone to the ball, and not gone to bed again, she could not look more weary and woebegone. Henny Helford, who called on her in my absence, was so alarmed by her appearance that she insisted on bringing in Dr. Newton after he had paid his visit to Stevie.'

'A very good plan; Newton's opinion is worth having. What did he say?'

'Well, for once, it seemed that he hardly knew what to say. I had a long talk with him after he had seen the dear girl; but he himself said very little. That she is out of sorts, nervous, and depressed is, however, very certain.'

'But she was quite well yesterday; indeed, until that impudent lad misbehaved himself on the river, she seemed in the highest spirits.'

'That is no index to a girl's mind,' observed Miss Aldred, sagely; 'and whether the incident you speak of caused the change or not, she is very different now. "Has she had any shock?" inquired the Doctor. Well, of course, I answered "No." "No disappointment in the way of a love affair?" And to that I answered "No." I thought it injudicious to admit that things had ever gone that length between Mr. Perry and Sophy. Then he said, "That's curious," and passed his hand across his mouth, as he always does, you know, when he is puzzled.

'"She's not herself," he said; "she's overwrought somehow."

'"Perhaps," said I, "it's the books she reads; she is a great novel reader."

'"Pooh! I'm speaking of her brain," he

said. "Novels won't hurt her. If she has any mental trouble, they will mitigate it; I always read novels myself when I'm in love, and then it blows over somehow."'

'How like Newton!' smiled the Canon. 'A moral Falstaff—only fatter. Then had he no advice to offer as to Sophy?'

'Yes; but it was, unfortunately, quite impracticable. "If she was my daughter," he said, "and money was no object in respect to her future, I should select some nice quiet young fellow, throw him very much in her company, and forbid her to encourage his attentions; then directly they were engaged he should marry her. She has had too much gaiety and dissipation, and has lived without an object in life. She has been her own mistress in one way, yet without any responsibilities; a spoilt child, in short. Now, when the least check comes in a life of this kind—and something of that sort has happened I feel certain—its importance is exag-

gerated and the whole world seems out of joint. The girl is a good girl, but my advice as regards her is what is given to a male rake, 'Let her marry and settle.' In his case the partner is but too often made a sacrifice; but I am sure Miss Sophy will make an admirable wife to any man whom she really respects; flirts always do."'

'The whole philosophy of a girl's life in a nutshell,' observed the Canon, smiling. 'Very cheap at half a guinea.'

'Just so,' assented Aunt Maria, drily; 'but it's a prescription one can't get made up at any chemist's. That is always the way with doctors. Good port for the poor, and the South of France for the invalid devoted to her own family in Bayswater.'

'Still, Maria, what if—to pursue your own metaphor—we can get this man Perry thrown into the dust-bin, and provide a new and less dangerous toy for Sophy? Cambridge is quite an emporium in that way.'

'They like, however, to choose their own toys,' sighed Aunt Maria, moved perhaps by some far off reminiscence of her own of a toy beyond her means, or which had been bespoken by another.

'There is a young man coming here to dine to-night,' observed the Canon, thoughtfully, 'who in some respects would answer to the Doctor's prescription. But he is a poor man; I don't say without expectations, for he has that sort of talent which never fails to succeed in life, but without any hope of inheritance—I mean he is of no family.'

Miss Aldred shook her head. 'I confess I believe in blood, William.'

'I know, my dear,' he answered drily; 'you think it is the great specific for the social fabric, like the King of Dahomey, who cements his palaces with it. Still, even the house of Hapsburg was begun with the merest mortar. However, you shall judge for yourself. In the meantime you must give Sophy

to understand that under this roof, at all events, she will never see Mr. Perry again, and that if she sees him elsewhere it will be in direct opposition to my wishes.'

The intervention of Canon Aldred in matters of his own house had the rarity of a miracle, but also the force. His laws, when he did go in for law-making, were as those of the Medes and Persians; and Aunt Maria was well aware that no pleading on her part on behalf of Mr. Herbert Perry, would either defer, or mitigate, his sentence of perpetual exile.

She bowed her head and pursed her lips, the former in obedience to her brother's ukase, the latter in silent protest against it; took up her needlework—a sign that she was not coming back in a hurry—and left the room.

She had no sympathy with the offender, but her heart was full of pity for Sophy, and she thought it inconsiderate of William,

though 'very like a man,' to insist upon such violent measures while the poor girl was ailing and in no condition for such imperious restraint. On the other hand, she was well convinced not only that the Canon was acting for Sophy's good, but that it *was* for her good; and in the coming struggle—for struggle she foresaw was awaiting her—was fully resolved to support the views of authority. Still she shrank from the conflict, and it was the desire to 'get it over,' that prompted her to such immediate action. A drop of water will wear away even a stone, and Aunt Maria's heart was by no means a stone, and much more pervious to drops of water. She anticipated tears and prayers, and her kind old chin fairly 'bibbered' with the thought of the pain she was about to inflict upon her favourite. In her own youth she had never suffered her thoughts to stray in any direction save where the hand-post of duty and obedience pointed; but in the charity of her

heart she was now reflecting that girls would be girls, and that, after all, poor Sophy's crime was a very venial one.

There are many such gentle souls in the world whom, because perhaps they are stiff, and old, and angular, we pass by in scorn, but whom the angels, I am inclined to think, regard in a very different fashion.

CHAPTER XIV.

A LITTLE SCOLDING.

UNCONSCIOUS of her aunt's step upon the stair, Sophy sits alone, with a letter in her hand. It has just reached her, but not by the post; for she has other ways of communicating with the outer world.

'Dear S.,'—it ran,—'Your absence last evening disappointed me immensely. I hope you really had a bad headache—I mean that it was *bonâ fide* and not a russe' (Mr. Perry's education had been classical, and did not include spelling, or the modern languages). 'The truth is, I have had enough of this sort of thing, and am getting tired of it. For all that I see of you, we might as well be like

your friend next door and her fascinating young lawyer in town. Moreover, something has occurred that makes it necessary to hurry matters, and about which I must talk to you at once. I shall drop in at the usual time to-day, unless I *see* or hear anything to the contrary; but it will be much better if I can have a word with you elsewhere—say, at the old mill. If I don't see you I shall wait for a line in Green Street up to four o'clock. That young dried herring, Adair, was at the ball last night, by-the-bye, looking, I thought, deuced nasty. That he suspects something, I'm pretty certain; but he didn't suspect how very nearly I was *ringing his neck.* Only a small matter, you will say; but still, another reason why the present state of things must be put an end to. Oh revoir.

'Yours, H. P.'

It is scarcely in nature that a young lady should regard with displeasure the impatience

of her lover, even though the inconvenience of its display should be ever so obvious; but Sophy's little brow had such a frown on it as suggested a padlock on a miniature, or a grenadier keeping guard over a jewel-box. Her blue eyes were wild and tearless; her delicate features were haggard with anger and fear. 'A selfish, heartless letter,' she said to herself; 'a cruel letter.' Then, looking up in her trouble and perplexity, she caught sight of her own face in the glass. 'You fool!' she exclaimed, apostrophising it with sullen bitterness. 'You mad and wicked fool!'

There was a knock at the door, and she thrust the letter hastily into her bosom, as Miss Aldred entered the room.

'Come, my dear, I am glad to see you have a little colour in your cheeks,' said Aunt Maria, kindly. 'I hope that means you feel better.'

'I never thought there was much the

matter with me,' said Sophy, with a little hysterical laugh. 'But, of course, the doctor had to find out something. I suppose he said "the heart;" they always say "the heart," because nobody can get at it and prove them to be in the wrong.'

'I hope it's not so bad as that,' returned Aunt Maria, with some significance. 'If you are really better and can bear it, I have a word or two to say to you, Sophia.'

To have one's Christian name abbreviated —to 'Tommy,' for Sir Thomas, for instance— by those who have no right to take such a liberty, is very annoying; but it only implies impudence, not displeasure, on the part of the offender. When, on the contrary, the Thomas is given at full length by those who are wont to call us Tommy, it is a sign that there is mischief brewing. The speaker had probably something serious to say, and not pleasant. Sophy had never been called Sophia by Miss Aldred but once: when, little more than a

child, she had set fire to her frock in dropping 'kisses' of sealing-wax on an envelope she had directed to some juvenile admirer; and it would scarcely have surprised her more had she been addressed as Iphigenia. She knew, however, in an instant what her visitor had come about—the subject that had just now been occupying her own mind, and, to say truth, was never absent from it, save when she found herself in company. Then indeed, thanks, as her enemies would say, to that desire of admiration from the other sex which was as sweet to her as cream to a cat, she forgot it.

It would have been fairer to ascribe it to the superficial character of a nature which, in other respects, was by no means contemptible. Her disposition was affectionate and trustful, generous and forgiving. Of her own free will she would have harmed no living thing; but she was as impressionable as the river sand, and as impulsive as the wind that sweeps it.

It was pitiable that one so unfit for the storms of life should at its very outset have rashly dared the illimitable ocean, far from port and home, yet hardly conscious of the doom that threatened her. In the trough of the sea, indeed, with hardly a star of hope visible to her, she was miserable and terrified enough; but when on the crest of the wave, lifted for a moment into the sunshine, she forgot the depths that menaced destruction to her. She saw them yawning now, and sat in affrighted silence, ready to catch at any spar, or straw, or floating weed; hopeless of safety, but eager for delay and respite. The terror in the girl's face, though the other little guessed what cause she had for fear, alarmed Aunt Maria in her turn.

'You may be sure, dear girl, that I am not come here to threaten or frighten you,' she said, gently. 'I am not, I hope, a very terrible personage, save to Johnnie' (the disobedient and plate-breaking page, with whom

she was wont to wage that unsatisfactory sort of war which takes place between regulars and guerillas); 'while to yourself I can never be anything more severe than your counsellor for good. I may say, indeed, quite as much for the Canon, your guardian. He can no more be unkind than he can be unjust. But, being a man, and knowing better than we women do what men are, he thinks more seriously of certain matters because he foresees the seriousness of their possible consequences. To some girls, for example, a flirtation even with an undesirable young man, may seem a trifling thing enough. She goes on thoughtlessly, step by step, till she finds herself entangled—even compromised; and while she only thinks of the present, and its passing pleasure, her whole future life may suffer for it. I promised you last night, though somewhat unwillingly, after what took place at the procession, that I would say nothing to your guardian of the frequency of

Mr. Perry's visits here; and I kept my promise. I trusted, and still trust, to your own good sense to put a stop to them of your own motion. But the Canon has spoken on the subject without any invitation on my part, and matters have been precipitated. He is very much annoyed, and even alarmed.'

'I am so sorry,' moaned Sophy. She sat in her chair as if she had been thrown there, all huddled up in a heap, with one hand a little raised, as if she would have warded off some physical blow.

'Of that I am quite certain, my dear' (and indeed it was clear enough), 'and I am something more than sorry. I do not blame you in the matter one whit more than I blame myself. If you have been wilful, I have been weak; though I have never encouraged any goings on between you and Mr. Perry, I have too much ignored the matter and kept silence about it.'

'For my sake,' put in Sophy, tenderly.

'Not altogether, my dear. When I look back on what has happened, I feel that I have sometimes neglected my duty, because it was unpleasant to perform it, and to save myself pain. I ought long ago to have told your guardian that this young man was paying you marked attentions, and, in particular, that they continued, when you were away from home, in town.'

Here Sophy hid her face, which had suddenly grown scarlet.

'I do not wish,' continued Aunt Maria, looking at her very fixedly, 'to reproach you with what is past and gone, Sophy; but your proceedings during that period were not what they should have been, I fear. Even so far as they came under my observation, they dissatisfied me, and I felt called upon, as you remember, to say something concerning them —though I did not say all—to my brother. It would have been better perhaps if I had been more frank. Still it was partly, at all

events, to shield you from what I then thought to be his uncalled-for displeasure, and I have some right perhaps to look for a little gratitude from you in consequence. I shall find it, you say?' (Sophy's lips had murmured something to that effect.) 'Very good. All I ask of you, then, is to pay the debt you owe into your own account. No return for anything I have done for you can, I assure you, be more agreeable to me than that you should act wisely and for your own good in this matter. It is a more serious affair than you yourself perhaps have any idea of, and I tremble to think of the consequences that may follow a contrary course of conduct. You have hitherto only seen one side of your guardian's character; it is indeed good all round, but though so tender and lenient to the erring, it is not so to—forgive me, but I only use his own expression—scamps and scoundrels. He is as suspicious of evil-doers as he is charitable and trustful to the rest of

his fellow-creatures. And it is certain that Mr. Herbert Perry has found his way into his black books. It is not without reason that he has got there, be assured of that, Sophy, though I do not wish to distress you with the disgraceful details ; but the point is, that there he is. Your guardian's prejudices, especially when they are well founded, are as fixed as his attachments; and in this case I am very certain nothing will move him. I am to say from him that Mr. Herbert Perry is never to cross the threshold of this house again. If you meet him elsewhere, or hold any communication with him, it will be in direct disobedience to your guardian's wishes—are you listening to what I say, Sophy ? '

' I have heard every word,' answered the girl, in a half-choked whisper, though, as her companion noticed with some surprise, she was not in tears. ' I will do my best, my very best, I promise you.'

'My darling, there is only way of doing your best,' returned Aunt Maria. 'I beg, I entreat of you, not to attempt to play fast and loose in the matter. Duplicity, or deception, are things my brother would never, never forgive.'

Sophy shuddered; she was thinking of what was *done*, not of what she was about to do.

'Sit down at once, Sophy, like a good, dear girl, and write to this unhappy young man—since I suppose you *must* write to him—the simple truth. It is not as if you were giving him up of your own free will—though I hope you are doing that also. There is no change of mind to plead, but simply one of circumstances. Your guardian has forbidden you to hold any further communication with him, and you have no alternative but to obey. You have only to write that.'

Only that! A crooked smile played upon

poor Sophy's lips. Then, after a long pause, she once more murmured, 'I will do my best.'

This time Aunt Maria found no fault with that expression, but pushed a little writing-table to her companion's side, and set pen and paper before her. She had the sense to see that the time for talk was over, and also that the girl should not be left to herself to think.

'Shall I be in your way if I wait till you have written your note?'

Sophy shook her head, and with a trembling hand set down a sentence or two, and placed it in an envelope.

'Quite right, my dear; the shorter the better,' said Aunt Maria, approvingly. 'You will promise me to send it, Sophy. It had better be posted at once.'

'Yes, Jeannette shall take it.'

Aunt Maria stooped and kissed the girl affectionately. 'The surgeon's knife is keen,' she said, 'but there is health in its use. God

'bless you, my darling; you will be better now that this weight is off your mind,' and, with another kiss, she left her.

Poor Sophy did not look like one who has had a weight taken off her mind. She rose wearily from her chair, and, passing into the opposite room, placed a large oblong card in the window that looked upon the road. Such a sign in London houses means that the delivery-cart, or the dustman, is to call. In her case it meant something quite different. To certain eyes which would presently catch sight of it, from the other side of the way, it would signify, 'My guardian is at home; you must not call.'

Then she rang for her maid.

'Jeannette, you must take this note to Green Street.'

'I do hope, Miss Sophy, that you are not going to do anything rash,' answered the girl hesitatingly.

'Rash! what should put that into your

head? I shall want you to walk out with me this afternoon, at four o'clock.'

'But not to meet Mr. Perry, surely?'

'Yes, it must be done,' said Sophy, changing her light tone for one of bitter gravity.

'But consider; you are both known so well, and it will be broad daylight.'

'Never mind; it will be, I trust, for the last time.'

'That's what you always say,' urged the waiting-maid; 'but yet it happens again and again. The pitcher will go too often to the well, Miss Sophy; indeed, indeed it will.'

'There will be no one to blame but myself, even if it does, Jeannette,' answered Sophy, with a sigh; 'here is the answer to his letter. Just leave it.'

It ran as follows:—

'Dear H.,—I cannot answer your note

in writing, nor answer it as you wish at all. Something very serious has happened. I will meet you behind the mill at five o'clock.'

CHAPTER XV.

A TRYST.

'BESIDE the pleasant mill at Trumpington,' says Wordsworth, 'we laughed with Chaucer in the hawthorn shade;' but it was with no expectation of merriment that Miss Sophia Gilbert, accompanied by her faithful waiting-maid Jeannette, took her way thither that May afternoon. The first time she had visited the place was at a little picnic during the long vacation, with Aunt Maria and a few friends; and there by accident she had first met with Herbert Perry. He had found his way there from the river as aimlessly as the *Babingtonia pestifera* got into the river —not, indeed, through a fountain-tube, but

almost as much by land as by water, carrying his canoe as Bruce did his vessels on Loch Fyne; indeed, he had appeared to the astonished picnickers as a headless visitant, or rather as a tortoise, with a pair of shapely human legs; and when, having crossed the neck of land, he dropped the boat he carried on his head, and disclosed the handsomest face in Cambridge, it made no slight sensation.

In that strange manner had Sophy 'met her fate,' as girls term in jest what is sometimes pitiless earnest. Afterwards, from tender association, perhaps, the spot had been a trysting-place for the two young people. Behind the mill, and upon a certain green peninsula between two streams, all was secluded enough; but they took care to arrive thither by different routes. On the present occasion the young man had come by the water-way, which was not the quickest. None who saw him paddling up the stream

from the river, or toilsomely bearing his boat along where navigation was impossible, could have imagined that he was on his way to an assignation. The 'River God,' as she used to call him, when, indeed, a certain divinity had seemed to hedge him round, was behind his time—a circumstance in itself significant of much (of old he had been willing enough to wait for *her*); and, in the meanwhile, mistress and maid walked up and down in silence, hidden by the 'hawthorn shade.' Sophy knew nothing of its poetical associations; if she had done so, she might have bitterly reflected that in all the generations since old Chaucer's time there could hardly have been such a tryst in that fair place as hers. Lover false and maid undone, there might have been; scenes of repentance and despair; but the circumstances, however woful, must have been different. Six months ago she had adored the man of whom she was the clandestine wife; and now—now—she

hardly dared say to herself what she thought of him; with what abhorrence she looked forward to a future which must be linked with his; with what apprehension and dismay she pictured the immediate consequence of his obstinacy and rashness, should he persist in his present behaviour. Yet it was curious that she felt more angry with herself, for her folly, than with him for his cruelty; and as every now and then she stepped by the water's side and gazed on her own image, she murmured, as before, 'You fool; you mad and wicked fool!'

She had reached the end of the peninsula, and was about to turn, when the silver beat of a paddle struck upon the ear; in that very time and place it had once been music to her, but now she shivered at the soundas though it were a passing bell.

'He is coming,' said Jeannette, in a warning voice.

As if she did not know that; as if she

did not see, though her face was still averted, the little boat gliding swiftly up the stream, impelled by those sinewy arms, and the shapely head with its crisp brown locks, and the form that had once been as Apollo's to her eyes, but was now odious as Apollyon's.

The canoe shot noiselessly to the bank, and he stepped out to meet her with a fleeting smile.

'Well,' he said, 'I am come, and with all the caution that an Indian uses in one of Cooper's novels; but I tell you fairly that I am tired of all this shying and shirking, and mean to put an end to it.'

She had held out her hand, but he had taken no notice of it; his face was flushed, not with the exercise he had taken, for such feats were feather weights with him; but, as she was well aware, with anger.

'If we are going to talk,' he said, looking towards Jeannette, 'though nothing you can say will make any difference, I promise you,

there had better be no listeners.' At this broad hint the worthy maid retired a few paces, not without a contemptuous sniff, and left the young people to their colloquy.

'Well, what is it, Sophy? You say something serious has happened. You can't mean to say that the Governor has heard of my visit last night. If so that slut yonder has betrayed us.'

'She has not betrayed us, Herbert; I wish every one was as faithful and true as Jeannette; nor do I know that my guardian has discovered that frightful imprudence of yours; but he has found out something you have done—I dare say equally rash—and has forbidden you the house.'

'Has he, begad?' returned the young man, with a contemptuous sneer. 'We'll see about that; so that's all, is it?'

'No, it is not all. I am forbidden after to-day to hold any communication with you whatever.

'On pain of the Canon's high displeasure, I suppose? That may affect some chorister boy in his cathedral, but not me. Now I tell you what I mean to do. Perhaps to-morrow, perhaps the next day, but at all events before the term is over, I mean to claim you as my wife.'

'Then you will ruin us both.'

'Speak for yourself, Sophy! As for me, I know my own business better than you can tell me. You talk as if you had no belongings but your guardian. You have a father-in-law, though he is not aware of the fact, who is my father; and quite as queer a fish to deal with as the Canon can be. Just because I am not much of a reader, he is dissatisfied with my "career"—so he calls it—at the University, and since, as he says, I don't seem inclined to do any good here—*i.e.* take my degree—he has announced his intention of taking my name off the college books. Here's his letter, received this morn-

ing; very amusing under the circumstances. An opening has occurred, it seems, in the Bush, and I am to be sent off to Australia to fill it. A likely joke—though from one point of view it is at least as serious as anything you have told me.'

'But, my dear Herbert,' pleaded Sophy, laying her hand on his arm, 'why should you not go to Australia—just for the twelve months that must elapse before our marriage is made public? By complying with your father's wishes you will help to make matters easy for us. By waiting a little longer we shall not have cause to fear opposition. And then consider the safety of such an arrangement, how much better than all these risks and dangers. We can write to one another, you know; and think how delightful it will be to feel that the time is getting less and less, every month and every week, to the period when we shall meet without fear, never to part again.'

He shook her hand off with angry vehemence and laughed derisively. 'That is a very pretty proposition, upon my soul; what tenderness and affection it exhibits; and how very like what the conduct of a newly-married wife should be! I have no doubt you would bear the twelve months' separation with great philosophy; and not without some trust in the "chapter of accidents," whereby it might easily happen that I should be lost at sea, or shot at the gold-diggings; and Miss Sophia Gilbert could find another husband more to her mind.'

'How can you be so unkind and talk of such horrid things, Herbert? Of course, I should be very miserable while you were away; but—er——'

'Ah! you may well say "but—er,"' interrupted the young man, with a sneer. 'It's "butter" indeed. You know how to lay it on with a trowel; but it is quite wasted on me, I do assure you. Try it on the Canon,

with whom it may be of use. You have deceived him long enough with palaver, now you'll have to undeceive him with palaver.'

'And if I was, as you say, to undeceive him,' returned Sophy, very white and quiet, 'what do you suppose would happen?'

'Well, there would be a row, of course; but he would say, like a wise man, "There's no use in crying over spilt milk." Perhaps I am not the sort of man he would have chosen for you. He would have preferred some bookish sneak like Adair, or some old fogey like Mavors; but, since we are married, he will have to make the best of it, and give us an allowance till you come of age.'

'That, I am well convinced, he never will,' said Sophy, firmly.

'And what does it matter if he doesn't? I can borrow money on your expectations for twelve months.'

'I have no expectations, Herbert; that is, I mean, I *shall* have none if you insist on

acting in this mad way. I am entirely dependent upon my guardian. If I marry while under age, without his consent, my fortune is forfeited. It goes into other hands.'

'I don't believe a word of it.'

'Thank you; it is true, nevertheless.'

'If it were true, it would only show how thoroughly well your people must have understood you, and what a slippery fish you always were; but it is most unlikely. I can find the truth out for myself, however, by going up to Doctors' Commons, and looking at your father's will. You are changing colour, I see; your story is false. You had better not send me on a fool's errand to town, young woman!'

'Herbert, Herbert! listen to me,' cried the girl, passionately. 'You don't know my guardian. If he ever finds out I have deceived him, he will never forgive me. And if I am not quite correct as to the——'

'Ha, ha!' he put in. 'I thought so. Now for another.'

'I say I am quite certain that the will leaves a great deal to his discretion. He can make us a handsome allowance when I come of age, or a poor one; he can advance us money, or withhold it. Go up to Doctors' Commons, if you doubt me; and you will find it is so. You don't know your danger.'

'Nor do you know yours, Sophy. Suppose for a moment that I accede to this Australian scheme—than which nothing is further from my intention—and if, when you were left behind in England, things should be said to your disadvantage. That man Adair, for example, knows enough; and, if I were not here to wring his neck, might use his knowledge to take away your character. That would be very awkward—I mean for you.'

'The register of our marriage is in St. Anne's Church,' said Sophy, slowly.

'You'd refer to that, would you? Upon my life, you take things very coolly,' returned the other, grimly.

She was not cool at all, but only desperate.

He had fathomed her hopes with great accuracy, when he spoke of the 'chapter of accidents' to which a voyage to Australia would expose him: above all things, it would give her time: her nature was of that thoughtless and impulsive sort to which a respite seems well-nigh equal to a pardon. If she could only get rid of this dead weight of apprehension for a month or two, she felt that she could breathe freely and be almost herself again.

'The contingency of which you speak,' she said, 'would, at all events, place me in no worse position than your rashness and impatience place me now. Oh, Herbert, I have given up everything for you! You promised me, upon your word of honour, to keep our marriage secret until I came of age.'

Her voice was so piteous, and her pretty face so appealing, that even the selfish heart of Herbert Perry was touched; unhappily, however, they also revived the cold embers of his love.

'But, Sophy, dear, you seem to forget that you and I are one. Is it nothing to you that I am separated from you, and only now and then have a chance of getting a word with you, even like this? And now you say that you are forbidden even to see me at all.'

The argument had force in it, and there had been a time when it would have succeeded with her; but now she could not even bring herself to say, 'And do I not suffer too?' In her heart of hearts she loathed and feared him.

'It is only for twelve months,' she said.

'Only for twelve months,' he answered, angrily. 'A pretty thing for a girl to say, even to her lover. But for a wife to her husband—well, for certain, that is not my

view, at all events. I shall write to my father and tell him how matters stand, and then let the old folks fight it out between them. And so, good evening to you.'

He had turned from her with fierce abruptness, and, stepping into his canoe, was out of arm-reach, or she would have clung to him in one last agonised appeal.

'Oh, Herby, Herby!' she exclaimed, using for the first time the endearing name by which she had been wont to call him, 'you have pledged your word to me.'

'My word! and did you not break *your* word when we met at St. Anne's, after promising Aunt Maria that you would never see me save in her company?'

A most cowardly and cruel speech, for what she had done had been for love of him. It was upon the tip of her tongue to say so; but perhaps she knew what his scoffing retort would be—that it was for love of her that he was about to break his word; or perhaps,

despairing though she was, her pride restrained her. At all events, she answered nothing; but with a sinking heart watched the light shallop disappear behind the alders. Her maid ran up to her, perceiving by her face that she was greatly agitated.

'He will do nothing to please me, Jeannette,' she murmured.

'I dare say not, Miss Sophia. I never had but one opinion of him. His heart is like the stone in yonder mill. For my part, I wish he was drownded.'

CHAPTER XVI.

SAD NEWS.

UPON the whole, however we men may complain of the hardness of our lives, Man's lot is free from the catastrophes to which that of Woman is liable. So long as he stops short of the infringement of the criminal law, things are rarely so desperate with him as they become with the other sex when they 'stoop to folly.' He may stoop low, and live to stoop again, but she, never. She only too literally 'falls to rise no more.' Sophy Gilbert, or to give her her proper title, Sophy Perry, of course, was in no such terrible plight as that. Tragedies infinitely graver were impending, swords of Damocles infi-

nitely sharper threatening to fall on housefuls of her own sex, though not indeed of her own rank in life; but her situation, if not tragic, was grave enough. What made it more serious was, that she was so singularly unfitted to bear it. It is a common circumstance, but one that fills us with the saddest forebodings for man's future, that the weak and fragile are too often marked out for misfortune. Why does Fate choose the frailest, as the schoolboy bully selects his victim, for persecution? If, as some tell us, she is paramount, and there is no more merciful power to overrule her, matters are bad with us indeed.

To some young ladies, had they been in Sophy's position, it may have seemed a not very difficult task, though an unpleasant one, to make confession of the weakness that had led them into it. 'I was in love with Mr. Herbert Perry, dear guardian; and since I knew I should not obtain your consent to our union, we married without it.'

But Sophy knew that the Canon, with all his kindness, was not a man to be mollified where duplicity and double dealing were concerned; he had always treated her with so much trust and affection, and she had shown herself so utterly unworthy of trust. Against Miss Aldred her transgression was still graver, for the very liberty Aunt Maria had allowed her, contrary to her own better judgment, she had clandestinely abused. Once let her be discovered, and all confidence—and, it was only too likely, all affection too—would be withdrawn from her; and beside the Canon and his sister there were few who loved her. Yet, hard as all this was, there were worse features in the case. If Mr. Herbert Perry had been an eligible suitor, forgiveness, after a time, at all events, might have been looked for; but he was no favourite of Aunt Maria's, and in the Canon's eyes he was, as we know, utterly worthless as well as objectionable. Worse than all, she had by this time, not-

withstanding her lack of opportunities, found this out for herself. She knew him to be coarse, selfish, and wrapped up in his own pleasure; and if his coltish nature broke through such a gilded pale as at present surrounded him—a husband of a few months, bound by every tie of honour and even of self-interest to behave himself with decency and circumspection—what was to be looked for when these restraints should be removed from him, and she became his indeed? A bitter task to plead for pardon, when, even if granted, it must needs be followed by life-long punishment!

It is not to be supposed that, because she had been so rash and wilful, Sophy did not shrink from the pain of exposure, as much as though she had been the most prudent and retiring of her sex. She foresaw only too plainly how the finger of public scorn would point, not only at her, but at them whose trust she had betrayed. This, then, was the

end of all her 'innocent flirtations,' the result of her 'having her own way,' and being permitted to indulge in harmless gaieties without restraint—a clandestine marriage. Nor when that was known would the scoffing cease. She was not in the position of those who, having committed an error, can make the best of it or conceal its consequences. It was, as we have seen already, no secret between her and her only confidante that her union, if it could be called such, with Mr. Herbert Perry was bitterly repented of. Jeannette, though she had given way to her young mistress's solicitations in that matter, had always been opposed to it; yet even from her Sophy could not conceal her chagrin and repentance. 'His heart is like a millstone; for my part, I wish he was drownded,' had been Jeannette's exclamation when she had said 'He will do nothing to please me;' and Sophy did not reprove her for it. His heart *was* hard; otherwise how could he have made

light of her unhappy position, and, with cruel irony, bid her undeceive her guardian, as she had long deceived him, 'by palaver'? The advice, however, notwithstanding the form in which it was conveyed, was good. Before the blow fell on her, which she knew would shatter so much, it behoved her to do her best to conciliate the Canon and turn his heart towards her. Perhaps if she were to please him very much, an opportunity might offer itself to confess all and implore his forgiveness before necessity compelled her to do so. When, therefore, on reaching home, Miss Aldred informed her that her brother had asked a friend that evening, and hoped she would feel herself well enough to come down to dinner, she answered cheerfully in the affirmative.

And when Aunt Maria, noticing how unlike herself she looked, observed, 'But not if it would distress you, darling,' she replied, 'It can never distress me to please the Canon.'

The Canon was really pleased; for, under the circumstances, he had felt that, so far as Sophy's company was concerned, he had invited Adair to the 'Laurels' in vain. His mind being set at rest on this point, this wily man bethought him of asking Mr. Mavors likewise. Not that he feared, as some men of his years would have done, a *tête-à-tête* with the young scholar after dinner. His mind was of that sort which accommodates itself to all ages and conditions of men; while in Adair's case, even if the talk should languish upon other topics, there was a common subject, Milton, for them to fall back upon. He asked the Tutor purely for Sophy's sake, since his presence would leave the young people more to themselves. It did not enter his head that the student and exponent of Plato could find any attraction in his ward, and took his ready acceptance of his invitation, at such short notice, as a personal compliment. When his sister suggested that Henny Hel-

ford should be asked, to make the little party complete, he replied, 'No, no; five is company and six is none,' with such decision that Aunt Maria acquiesced at once, in dumb amaze; and not until she had applied herself to that arithmetical problem, in the privacy of her own room, free from all disturbing influences, did she arrive at its solution.

Perhaps the translation in the sacred volume was wrong, she admitted, for the Canon often told her such was the case; but, otherwise, 'Why, bless the man,' was her reflection, 'does not Scripture itself tell us, "How vain is the net spread in sight of any bird," and how much more in that of a young woman?'

Nor did she over-estimate, at all events in the case in question, the sagacity of the intended victim. Directly Sophy heard Mr. Adair's name announced (for her aunt had not divulged the name of the expected guest), she guessed in an instant for what cause the

Canon had invited him. Young ladies of her description have their mind very full of lovers and love-making. I have a suspicion (which has, however, long ceased to put *me* upon my best behaviour) that they look upon every young gentleman who is introduced to them as a possible husband. In Sophy's case, this was, of course, out of the question, nor did she indeed credit her guardian with having introduced Adair with any definite matrimonial intentions; what she did think—and her thought was not far from the mark—was that Adair was asked by way of foil to Mr. Perry; and as an example of the sort of man to which the Canon wished to draw her favourable attention.

'Hitherto, my dear girl,' he seemed to her to say, 'you have shown a preference for cheap fancy goods, which will neither wash nor wear; allow me to show you a specimen of a stouter fabric, warranted to last your lifetime.'

It was, as we have said, Sophy's fixed resolve to please the Canon, and, without much thought beyond it, she welcomed Mr. John Adair with a graciousness beyond his hopes. It did not strike her that, in case she showed signs of encouraging his attentions, the displeasure of her guardian would be all the greater when he came to know the real state of affairs. It was not her nature—when the consideration was not forced upon her—to think of the morrow; and, moreover, it is possible that her husband's evil behaviour caused her to regard, with less disfavour than heretofore, the man he had described as a 'dried herring.' He was certainly thin, thinner in his suit of evening clothes than usual, and still thinner by comparison with Mr. Mavors, who not only towered above him, but appeared on either side of him, giving the young scholar, for the moment, the remarkable appearance of having four arms. But when one looked at the latter's keen face

and speaking eyes, one forgot that he was thin, as men forgot it in Paganini's playing. Mr. Mavors certainly did not remark that he was so thin, but (with regret and envy) that he was so young. From the Canon's note he had gathered that he was to be the only guest that evening, and he was by no means pleased to find that the same young gentleman who had monopolised so much of Miss Sophy's conversation the previous evening had been also invited. In other matters he was by no means diffident; it was not likely to be the case with a gentleman who had been reported to say of himself, 'I'm not a conceited man, but I believe I know everything but botany;' but in affairs of the heart he felt that he was a freshman, though (unhappily) not in his first year.

After his salutations, he confined his attentions to Miss Aldred, not because she was his hostess and it was his duty, but from sheer bashfulness and ignorance of what

a young lady like Miss Sophy would expect him to say. Adair, on the other hand, was by no means bashful, and entered at once into conversation with her. There was not, however—and this impressed her favourably—the least trace of familiarity (such as he had shown before), or the consciousness of being in possession of any secret of hers, in his tone or manner. The folding-doors between the drawing-room and the smaller apartment—with which, as she must have been well aware, he had gained entrance the preceding night—were open; but not a look escaped him to remind her of any previous occurrence, and when she presently took him into it to show him a portrait of the Canon, and they were alone together, he remarked upon the apartment as though he were beholding it for the first time. Perhaps it would have been wiser if Sophy had not accepted the position thus offered to her so readily as she did, since, in chiming in with

this agnostic manner of his, she was, in fact, making herself not only his confidante but his confederate. The road, however, was smoother this way, and it was her wont to take the smoothest road.

'It was a very gay ball, I hear,' said she.

'I believe so.'

'But were you not there yourself?'

'I was there for a little while, but' (here his voice dropped) 'I was disappointed of *my* dance, you know.'

'How foolish! as if there were not fifty other young ladies to dance with!'

'I only cared to dance with the one that was not there. When you did not come I was assured some misfortune had taken place——'

'The house burnt down, eh?' she put in, smiling.

'Yes; something of that kind; and so I walked up here to see for myself.'

After all, then, consideration for her

position had not kept him silent. His very phrase, 'to see for myself,' seemed to have a selfish touch in it. Perhaps young men were all alike, egotistic, heartless, cruel.

'It was very bad weather, was it not?'

'I don't know,' he answered, softly; 'I was not thinking of the weather.'

The tenderness of his tone was such that she could hardly ignore it; under other circumstances it would undoubtedly have pleased her, as all such incense did; as it was, no harm could come of it, if Herbert put his resolve of writing to his father into effect (when she thought of that her very heart stood still, but for to-night she had shut it out of her thoughts), and in the meantime she would be pleasing the Canon by being civil to the young man.

So she only smiled, and murmured, 'Indeed.'

Then Barclay, the butler, came to the rescue with his battle cry, 'Dinner is served,'

and Adair offered his arm and took her in. Mr. Mavors sat opposite to them. His duty to his neighbour and his hostess compelled him to converse with Miss Aldred, but his eyes often strayed over the way to Sophy. What on earth could she find to say, he wondered, to that uninteresting youth devoted to the higher mathematics, and what could have induced Aldred to ask such a fellow to dinner? It was not an Egyptian feast, that a skeleton should be any attraction to it.

Adair was speaking with approval of the walks about Cambridge, with which, as a reading man, he was very conversant from frequent 'constitutionals.'

The Canon quoted a line from 'In Memoriam' concerning the 'level flats,' and added something caustic of his own with respect to intellectual eminence which, he remarked, loomed against the horizon in that locality somewhat larger than it looked elsewhere. Of this latter taunt the Tutor, generally eager

enough for combat on that ground, took no notice, but inveighed against the local scenery. No one but a mathematician, he said, could see anything to admire in a plain crossed by straight lines. Some people, however, could find grandeur even in the Gogmagogs; had Miss Gilbert ever heard the story of the freshman and the deaf professor in connection with that range of mountains? As Sophy had not heard it the Tutor proceeded to narrate it. It was a fine old stock story such as enjoys a perpetual youth in the University atmosphere, and blooms (very unlike the aloe) a hundred times every October term, when new ears come up to hear it; only on this occasion Mr. Mavors dropped a little tarragon over it.

'The professor gave a dinner party,' he said, 'at which many eminent persons were present. With more good nature than good judgment, he included among his guests one solitary and very shy undergraduate; the unfortunate youth, feeling bound to say some-

thing to his host, hazarded the remark that the Gogmagogs were very high hills. The professor requested him to repeat the observation; and, still unable to catch it, told his servant to fetch his ear-trumpet. The appearance of that unhappy youth while waiting for the ear-trumpet, and vainly endeavouring to think of some observation more worthy of the occasion and the instrument than the "Gogmagogs are very high hills," I shall not easily forget.'

'Poor boy,' said Sophy, plaintively; 'and then what happened?'

'Well, nothing more, except that the professor listened to the young gentleman's remarks amid the profoundest silence, and laid down his trumpet with an "Ugh!" which Mr. Fenimore Cooper describes as "so significant in the mouth of a red Indian."'

'I think the walk to Chesterton is one of the pleasantest,' continued Adair, resuming his conversation with Sophy, as if it had

suffered no solution of continuity whatever, 'and then home by Trumpington Mill.'

Sophy felt the blood rush to her forehead, and was about to stammer out some commonplace, when a note was placed by the butler in the Tutor's hand, with a whispered 'The bearer waits, if you please, sir.'

While the Canon was saying 'Nothing the matter, I hope, Mavors?' and Miss Aldred, expressing the same sentiment by her anxious looks, 'I shall be staying up during the long vacation,' went on Adair, in a lower tone, 'and I hope you will allow me sometimes to point out to you—and to Miss Aldred, of course—what is most worth seeing in the neighbourhood.'

'It will give us great pleasure,' she said, 'I'm sure.'

It was a bold reply; was it possible that Mr. Mavors had heard it, since he threw such a quick, serious glance across at her, and

looked so grave? He had read the note, and was putting it carefully into his pocket.

'Tell the messenger, Barclay,' he said, 'that I shall be in my rooms in twenty minutes.'

'Must you leave us so soon?' inquired the hostess, sympathetically.

'Why, yes, I am sorry to say I must; it is a piece of rather pressing college business. Prater (the other Tutor) is away this week, so I have his "side" to look after as well as my own.'

Miss Aldred, with womanly tact, at once perceived that something serious, but which was not to be disclosed, at all events to ladies' ears, had happened, and gave Sophy that mystic nod which is the blue-peter of the female fleet: the signal for sailing out of the room. As the door closed behind them, Mr. Mavors, with his hand upon his chair, observed with emotion, 'A sad calamity has taken place, Aldred.'

'Not, I trust, of a private nature?' exclaimed the Canon.

'As regards myself, no; but, from something that dropped from you the other day, I am afraid it may affect you somewhat. Mr. Herbert Perry was, I believe, an occasional visitor at the "Laurels." He is drowned. His body has just been found in the river.'

CHAPTER XVII.

BREAKING IT.

THE news of death, especially if it be sudden and violent, will sober a drunken man; even those who 'play at the game whose moves are death'—seasoned old soldiers—feel some shock when a comrade is snatched away from them by other than professional means—shot, shell, or steel. In civil life, for the moment, it creates a stir with which no other catastrophe—bankruptcy, an elopement, or even being raised to the Peerage—can compare. No man is so lethargic, or so immersed in greed or pleasure, but that at those terrible tidings a secret door is opened in his own soul, and he looks forth, if it is but for an

instant, upon the dark unfathomed void that is awaiting him also. When the awful summons has been served upon one in youth and strength its effect upon the by-standers is still greater.

In the present case Mr. Mavors was, as was natural, the least moved of all those present. The dead man was personally unknown to him. He could only call to remembrance the tall handsome young fellow that had stood up (from various causes, with some difficulty) in the boat only last evening to drink Miss Gilbert's health, and was now nerveless, bloodless, breathless. Not for one instant did it enter into his mind that, since the unworthy object of her affection was removed, the girl for whom he had himself begun to entertain 'the low beginnings' of love had been rendered more accessible to him.

Nor, at all events for the present, did it occur to the Canon to congratulate himself

upon a trouble ended—a domestic knot thus opportunely severed by the hand of Fate.

'Poor fellow, poor fellow!' he murmured, softly.

These men were both, by nature, gentlemen.

Adair, too, was not unmoved. Death was no more familiar to him than to the other two, but he felt less of horror. There was something in his heart, though not in his voice, that smacked of hesitating satisfaction as he inquired, 'Are you quite sure of this, Mr. Mavors?'

'Only too sure.'

'How did it happen?' inquired the Canon. 'How *could* it have happened?' Meaning that to the dead man water had been as his natural element. If the misfortune had been less tremendous he would have said, 'Why, he could swim like a fish!' In catastrophes we do not use metaphors or commonplaces.

'He was rowing up some branch of the

river where boats are forbidden, and was caught by the chain across the stream. I must go and see the poor lad, I suppose,' added the Tutor, with melancholy apprehension, for his organisation was delicate, or rather his mode of life had made it so, 'and then telegraph to his father.'

'A terrible task,' observed the Canon. 'Good Heavens! if it had been *my* boy.'

'You would have had less to regret, in many ways,' sighed the Tutor, rising.

Adair rose also. It was clear that the absence of strangers would be desirable. 'I deeply regret, Adair,' said the Canon, 'that your first evening at "The Laurels" should be thus associated with calamity. The next time you come let us hope there will be more of l'Allegro and less of Il Penseroso. Poor young man, poor young man!'

Adair and Mr. Mavors walked away together; the distance between Tutor and student, and that wider gulf caused by natural

antagonism, bridged over for the time by what had happened. When the palace of the French King was flooded by the mob, 'the grand entries,' we read, 'were graciously accorded' by his Majesty to even untitled loyalists.

'Did you know this unfortunate young fellow, Mr. Adair?'

'Slightly, sir.'

'He was not a reading man, I understand.'

'By no means; no, sir,' was the dry reply.

'A little fast? A great pity. Still, let us hope there was nothing seriously amiss.'

Unhappily, the recollection of his late enemy, as he strode back to the gate of 'The Laurels' the previous night, and caused him to cower among the leaves, here occurred to Adair.

'There is no harm in hoping, sir,' he

answered coldly; 'but the truth is, Perry was a bad lot.'

Mr. Mavors glanced at his companion scornfully. He seemed to recognise in him, for the first time, the rival not of himself but of the dead man.

'Truth is a fine thing,' he said; 'still, it is a pity that you neglect the classics, since, at the very outset, they teach us to be charitable to those who have gone over to the majority.'

Not a word more passed between them till their stiff good-night at the corner of Green Street, when Mr. Mavors betook himself to the dead man's rooms, whence he presently issued, with a white face and a smothered aspiration that Mr. Prater would stop up to look after his own pupils.

At 'The Laurels' the matter, unhappily, could not be so easily dismissed. It was a great relief to the Canon's mind to find, upon returning to the drawing-room, that Sophy had retired to her own room upon plea of

indisposition; and, indeed, so soon as the excitement of society was lacking, and her mind reverted to her own affairs, the poor girl had found the effort of sustaining domestic conversation with Aunt Maria beyond her powers.

Miss Aldred, though no philosopher, possessed, as her brother flattered himself, much too well-balanced a mind to be 'upset' by the intelligence he had to communicate; she would bear it (he foresaw) like a Christian, and was, in fact, just the sort of person to break the news to poor Sophy instead of himself.

So far, however, from bearing with dignity the decree of Fate as regarded Mr. Herbert Perry, Miss Aldred received the Canon's news with such a flood of tears and wringing of hands as he had never seen out of a stage play.

Even his stiff, 'I am altogether disappointed in you, Maria,' which he threw at

her like cold water, to 'bring her to' (though in his heart he was very sorry for her), altogether failed of its intent. She was beyond the reach of such simple remedies.

It was not alone the sudden shock that had thus overwhelmed her; her conscience reproached her for having encouraged this unhappy young man (or, at all events, not discouraged him); and thereby exposed poor Sophy to those bitter regrets which would, no doubt, be henceforth her portion. The Canon, of course, knew nothing of this, and was fairly appalled by this failure of his calculations.

'If you allow yourself to be thus overcome in my presence, Maria (which I should have thought would have had some restraining influence over you), how can I trust you to carry this sad news to poor Sophy?'

Miss Aldred sobbed and shook her head. It was plain that she had no intention of carrying anything of the kind.

'But, Maria, you must surely perceive

that this painful duty can only be performed by one of your own sex. As for me, it would be most unbecoming and—dear me—indelicate. It would be also most injudicious, since the fact of my undertaking such a task would exaggerate its importance—would presuppose, I mean, certain feelings in poor Sophy which it is essential should be ignored.'

But all these fine words and varnished phrases were quite lost on Aunt Maria.

'I couldn't do it, my dear brother,' she sobbed, 'to save my life.'

'Then who, in Heaven's name, is to do it?'

Here there was a gentle knock at the door, and the question was answered for them by the entrance of Henny Helford.

The girl, who was in bonnet and shawl, had a pale face, but not a frightened one.

'I have heard the news,' she said, in earnest, pitiful tones; 'and came in quickly by the back way, in case I might be of any use

to dear Sophy. Oh, Miss Aldred, how does she bear it ?'

'My dear, she has not yet been told,' answered the other, eagerly ; 'that is just what the Canon and I are talking about. We think that if a dear friend, and one of her own age, like you, could be induced to undertake such a mission, it would be very much the better for—for all of us.'

'If you think that, of course I'll do it,' said Henny, simply.

'You are a good, kind girl,' said the Canon, shaking her by the hand. 'Of course, this poor young fellow could never have been more to Sophy than an acquaintance ; but still, there was a certain intimacy. It will be a shock, no doubt, to her, and a very painful task to you.'

'Pray do not think of that,' said Henny. 'If my case were hers, I am sure she would do her best for me ; though, indeed, if it were Frederick '—her eyes filled with tears at the

mere thought of such an overwhelming calamity—'I think no human being could comfort me.'

'The case you suppose, however, and Sophy's are vastly different,' observed the Canon, decisively. 'Mr. Perry's death can only affect my ward, I trust, as that of any other young man with whom she was on friendly terms. Still, I am not the less obliged to you for your kind offer, Henny. You heard how it happened, I conclude?'

'Yes, poor fellow—the chain,' sighed Henny.

'And you will be sure to say how sorry we are,' put in Aunt Maria, earnestly. 'It is so unfortunate that only to-day I was obliged to speak to the poor child about him; when if we had waited'—and she looked at her brother reproachfully.

'We can only do what seems to us to be the best at the time,' returned the Canon, with a shade of irritation. 'If we could look

into the future we should all behave differently, no doubt ; but so far as my resolution with regard to this unhappy young man was concerned, I have nothing to repent of—nothing ; and there's an end of it.'

And such, alas ! must necessarily be our reflections in such cases. A little time is given to sentimental commiseration ; then common sense asserts itself ; and eventually it is made clear that, after all, the private calamity is a substantial public benefit. It is what happens in the case of all who, upon the whole, have done evil rather than good—have decreased rather than increased the sum of human happiness. Their death is 'a happy release ;' however we gloze it over, it is well that they are gone.

Sophy had gone to her own room ; but not, as she had given out, with the intention of retiring to rest. Sleep, as she well knew, was far from her eyes. She had but exchanged her attire for a dressing-gown ; and,

seated in an arm-chair and with a book in her hand (not for study, but as a blind to whomsoever might intrude upon her solitude), had given herself over to meditation—fear.

Henny's quiet knock she had taken for that of her maid, and she did not even look up at her entrance, but sat staring straight before her, with haggard face and anxious eyes, the very picture of regret and despair.

'Is it possible,' thought Henny, gazing at her in hushed amaze, 'that she already knows what has taken place?'

'The silence aroused Sophy from her evil dreams. 'Good heavens! *you* here, Henny?' she exclaimed. 'There is nothing wrong at home, I trust?'

'No, darling, not at my home,' she answered, with grave significance.

Sophy trembled from head to foot. Had this cruel man, then, already betrayed her? or allowed her secret to escape him in his cups? Was the Canon so vehement in his indignation

that he had not permitted Aunt Maria to speak with her, but had sent for Henny Helford to break to her some harsh, irrevocable decree ?

'Some very bad news has come to-night,' continued Henny, 'concerning Mr. Herbert Perry.'

What news could it be ? Had he openly proclaimed that he was her husband, and been set down as a boastful and malignant liar ? She could not bring her thoughts to bear on him save in some relation, more or less offensive, to herself.

'As he was boating on the river this afternoon, Sophy, a terrible accident happened —— Don't look so strange, my darling,' for Sophy's face had exhibited, first a wild surprise, and then an expression which Henny could not translate at all—one of unutterable relief. 'Calm yourself, and strive to bear it like a good, brave girl.'

'Is he dead, Henny ? '

Only four words; but in their tones expressing as much anxiety as the human voice can convey.

'Alas, dear, yes! He is drowned!'

Sophy fell back in her chair, with her eyes closed. Henny thought she had fainted, and flew to the window to give her air.

It was fortunate, for if she had returned to her place by her friend's side, Sophy's smothered ejaculation of 'Thank Heaven! could hardly have escaped her ears.

Enfranchisement is a blessed thing, no matter by what means it is obtained—whether by manumission, or the death of the task-master. The air that Sophy breathed was the air of freedom: those only can understand its sweetness who have been deprived of it.

'Darling, darling Sophy, try to bear it,' whispered Henny, fervently.

'I will; I do.' Then, in low tones which she strove to clothe in sorrow and strip of eagerness, 'When did it happen?'

The form of inquiry was strange enough, the more natural question being obviously, 'How did it happen?' But Henny set it down to her friend's confusion and distress of mind. As a matter of fact, Sophy had expressed the real point of her anxiety clearly enough.

'He was rowing on the river, poor fellow, up some back stream where there was a chain across; after chapel.'

Sophy groaned. The first part of Henny's reply had comforted her companion; she knew that the obstacle in question existed on the stream that led from Trumpington Mill, and she took it for granted that the unhappy young man had perished on his return home from their interview early in the afternoon; there could have been no time for him to have reached home and written that letter to his father which he had threatened her with; but Henny's concluding words had filled her anew with apprehension; if the catastrophe

took place after chapel there *had* been time. If that evidence of her marriage existed, it would be impossible to suppress it. A life of misery and thraldom was, indeed, no longer before her; but shameful exposure was—it was but too likely—awaiting her. It may have been a small thing to think of, side by side with such an awful catastrophe; but the one had happened and the other had not, and might be remedied. Under the influence of terror, the weak are scarcely less heartless than the cruel. There was, however, one advantage in this new cause for alarm. It filled poor Sophy with all the melancholy which her companion expected to find in her from another cause; there was no longer any need for hypocrisy. Her distress was such, indeed, that Henny began to feel that it was aggravated by her presence; and, with her usual simplicity and straightforwardness, presently inquired if this was the case.

'I came here to comfort you, my darling;

but, if, now that I have fulfilled my sad errand, you feel that you would rather be alone, do not hesitate to say so.'

'If you don't mind, if you would not be hurt, dear Henny, I think I would,' was the whispered rejoinder.

'And your Aunt Maria; you would, perhaps, rather not see her to-night? While a wound is tender, one shrinks from even the kindest touch.'

'True, darling, true,' answered Sophy, eagerly; 'how well you understand me! I had rather be quite alone.'

Henny rose at once, and the girls embraced one another affectionately. Sophy dearly loved her friend. Nor must it be supposed that she had no scruples in deceiving her; her conscience reproached her very keenly, notwithstanding that, in truth, she had no alternative in the matter. It is not the least among the many drawbacks attaching to a course of duplicity, that it

forbids us to be open even with those from whom we would fain have no secrets: when we once leave the plateau of plain dealing, it is impossible to reascend at pleasure; a road has first to be made to it with toil and trouble, and by the work of our own hands.

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